



LORD OF ALL REALMS

BOOK 05

Ni Cang Tian

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Lord of All Realms

(Jue Dui Xuan Xiang)

(绝对选项)

by

Pear Lands In The Autumn Spring

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Synopsis

In ancient times, there existed giant spirits capable of supporting the heavens. With bodies as enormous as stars, they soared across the universe. Great clan leaders with mysterious blood running through their veins shattered the void and created new worlds. Ancient Qi Warriors crossed a river of stars to enlighten numerous mortal beings. For unknown reasons, an era silently came to an end, all realms were separated, ancient giant spirits disappeared one after another. Thousands of years later, young Nie Tian managed to travel back into ancient times with the help of a drop of blood...

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Chapter 401: What Do You Want?

Dong Li didn't reply.

Instead, she smiled at Nie Tian as she once again lifted her wrist and whispered into her bracelet, "Time to pull in the net."

Nie Tian was stunned.

However, he learned the meaning of Dong Li's words in the next moment.

Numerous people started moving about quickly in the dense bushes around Black Water Lake, revealing a very large blockade that sealed this entire area.

At that moment, the people from the Realm of Black Marsh saw the reality of things.

They realized that their plan to snatch spirit plants from the Dong Clan was no long viable.

They couldn't even finish off the three groups of explorers, much less the experts that were closing in on them.

"Retreat!" The man with the hawkish nose cried out.

Upon hearing his cry, the Qi warriors from the Realm of Black Marsh immediately left their opponents and scattered away in a hubbub.

By the time the three groups of explorers realized what was going on, their opponents had already broken up and disappeared into the tall bushes.

Dong Li seemed as composed as ever, but the look in her eyes turned colder and colder.

Via the seven Heaven Eyes Nie Tian had spread out to cover the area, Nie Tian could see with great clarity that powerful experts from the Dong Clan were shrinking their blockade.

Their strength and cultivation bases were far superior to the explorers’.

As the people from the Realm of Black Marsh attempted to break through their blockade in different locations, every one of them was met with strong resistance.

Sounds of battle, desperate wails, and agonized shrieks that snapped prematurely filled the air.

Nie Tian could see through his Heaven Eyes that the black-robed Qi warriors were being slaughtered by powerful experts from the Dong Clan.

Even their leader, the late Greater Heaven stage man with a hawkish nose, was surrounded by several powerful experts from the Dong Clan. From their stance, it seemed that they wanted to capture him alive.

Nie Tian immediately realized why Dong Li hadn’t been eager to summon her own people, but rather had them stay put at the perimeter.

On the one hand, she wanted the three groups of explorers to tire the thieves from the Realm of Black Marsh out. On the other hand, she wanted her own people to form a watertight blockade while the explorers kept the thieves busy.

Once the blockade was fully formed, it would be harvest time.

Dong Li knew that if she scared those thieves off with her clansmen, it would be very hard to capture or kill them all in the dense foliage, which was why she had made such a deployment.

She intended to get them all in one go.

“What?!” A shudder suddenly ran through Nie Tian’s body as he examined the actions of the Dong Clan members via his Heaven Eyes.

Via one of his Heaven Eyes, he caught sight of the group of people

from the Cloudsoaring Sect.

He discovered that his grandfather Nie Donghai, Nie Qian, Jiang Lingzhu, Ye Gumo, and the others were by the foot of a small mountain peak, and they were marching in his direction at full speed.

He could even see the urgency on Nie Donghai's face.

WHOOSH!

Han Mu, who was waiting for people from the Realm of Black Marsh to run into their net, suddenly sensed something, and dashed off towards Nie Donghai and his team.

It wasn't long before Han Mu appeared in Nie Donghai and Zhan Yuan's sight.

Seeing Han Mu appearing in front of his grandfather, Nie Tian was deeply worried, yet there was nothing he could do.

He knew that everything was going perfectly according to Dong Li's plan.

Han Mu, who had tangled with Nie Tian for months in the Realm of Split Void, stopped his dashing momentum in front of Nie Donghai and Zhan Yuan. "Greetings, I'm a member of the Dong Clan."

After learning that Han Mu was from the Dong Clan, Zhan Yuan let out a sigh of relief, and said without any hesitation, "We're from the Cloudsoaring Sect. Thank god! We've been hoping to meet people from your clan! A group of unknown Qi warriors recently appeared in Black Water Lake's vicinity. They disregarded the rules set up by your clan and madly assaulted fellow explorers. We..."

Zhan Yuan detailedly explained everything that had happened recently to Han Mu.

Han Mu started smiling the moment he learned about their

identity. With a very polite tone, he said, “Our clan has already learned about the situation you just mentioned. Don’t worry. Miss Dong has made deployments accordingly, and we’re already dealing with those rats from the Realm of Black Marsh. I believe there will be a clear result soon.”

Upon hearing these words, Zhan Yuan and everyone else, who had felt quite insecure and uneasy recently due to the existence of those killers, put their minds at ease.

Of course they didn’t have a clue regarding the entanglement between Nie Tian and Dong Li. They just felt relieved that the problem that had been hanging over their heads was finally gone.

Jiang Lingzhu tapped her chest and said with a relaxed and admiring tone, “Hahaha, now that Miss Dong has come and dealt with it personally, there’s no reason for us to worry anymore. I’ve heard some stories of Miss Dong. She’s such a capable woman! With her being here, there’s no way that those people from the Realm of Black Marsh will escape!”

Laughing softly, Han Mu’s gaze frequently swept across Nie Donghai and Nie Qian.

After Jiang Lingzhu was finished, he nodded gently and said, “Come with me. I’ll take you to see Miss Dong. You don’t need to worry about that rubbish from the Realm of Black Marsh anymore.”

Zhan Yuan and the others gladly followed along.

“You’re Mr. Nie, right?” Han Mu asked, looking at Nie Donghai.

Astonished, Nie Donghai asked, “Do you know me?”

“Hahaha.” Han Mu let out a meaningful laugh. “You might get to meet someone you’ll be very surprised to meet soon.”

“Who??” Nie Donghai was deeply puzzled.

Han Mu laughed out loud. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

...

As Dong Li's bracelet glimmered with misty light, she held it close to her ear. After listening for a while, a low chuckle escaped her mouth.

Nie Tian, however, looked very grim.

Dong Li chuckled, apparently in a good mood. "Guess who Han Mu just found. You remember Han Mu, don't you? He was there with me when we were in the Realm of Split Void."

Nie Tian, who had already learned what was going on through his Heaven Eyes, dropped to the ground.

He took out a few pieces of spirit beast meat. With a sulking face, he tore chunks of meat off with his teeth and swallowed them to recover the flesh power he had just consumed, while pondering what he should do.

"Why are you not talking?" Dong Li's smile grew broader.

Her full figure swayed as she stepped closer to Nie Tian flirtatiously. After throwing a jade plate on the moist grassland, she followed Nie Tian's example and sat down in front of him.

The two of them sat face to face, barely one meter apart.

With a warm smile, Dong Li took the initiative and explained, "Han Mu found that group of people from the Cloudsoaring Sect, along with your grandfather and another person who I believe is your aunt."

"I'm going to ask you one more time. What do you want?" Nie Tian said coldly.

Seeing that Nie Tian wasn't shocked at all, Dong Li went blank for a moment before coming to a realization. "Impressive. Apparently, you've already learned what just happened to them. This makes sense. Considering you managed to break free from the blockades I arranged for you over and over again, you must have

your special method of learning things.”

“Spill it. What do you want?” Nie Tian said in a low voice.

He saw via his Heaven Eyes that Han Mu had already gathered a few powerful Dong Clan experts and escorted his grandfather’s team towards his location.

Under these circumstances, escaping with Starshift like he had done in the wasteland in the Realm of Split Void was no longer an option.

Since Dong Li had his family, he could only admit that he had been outmaneuvered and lay low.

“What do I want?” Dong Li repeated Nie Tian’s question.

Eyes narrowed, she recalled what Nie Tian had done to her in the Realm of Split Void. The smile on her face gradually faded away.

“Do you still remember how you humiliated me in the dense forest right after I killed Shen Wei?” With these words, she subconsciously glanced down at her left breast.

She still remembered that, after Nie Tian had pinned her down, not only had he run his hands up and down her body willfully, but he had also grabbed her left breast vigorously. Now that she thought about it, she could almost still feel the wrenching pain.

“Do you still remember calling me ‘dumb woman’ repeatedly in those little messages you left me?

“You humiliated me so recklessly back then. What do you expect I will do to you?!” Dong Li spat out every word with a great force. Flames of rage were burning within her eyes. However, the flames were bone-piercingly cold, as if they were formed by unlimited killing intent.

Nie Tian remained silent.

He continued to consume spirit beast meat as he wracked his mind for a way to save his grandfather and aunt.

As ideas popped up in his mind and passed by him one after another, he didn't listen to anything that Dong Li had just said.

After pondering for a while, the only thing that seemed viable was kidnapping Dong Li.

As soon as he made up his mind, his flickering eyes became determined and calm.

However, just as he was about to make a move, Dong Li, who was sitting within arm's reach of him, suddenly let out a cold laugh. Meanwhile, the jade plate she was sitting on started to emanate brilliant light.

The light instantly enveloped Dong Li's appealing body.

"I know what you are thinking." Dong Li slowly rose to her feet. To Nie Tian's surprise, she took the bracelet on her wrist off and tossed it away, saying, "Now I can't communicate with Han Mu or issue commands to the other Dong Clan members. It will still take a while for Han Mu and your family to get here.

"Don't say that I never gave you a chance, Nie Tian.

"Now you have the opportunity to capture me alive during this time, and use me to trade for your family's safety."

Chapter 402: Beast Spirit Incantation!

With a grim expression, Nie Tian asked, “Are you serious?” He looked coldly at Dong Li, who had already put some distance between them, but he wasn’t in a hurry to launch attacks.

After all, he wasn’t sure what Dong Li was up to.

In his eyes, Dong Li was extremely cunning and vicious. She would never do something without a plan, and she was never fond of solving problems through battles.

Since Han Mu already controlled the team from the Cloudsoaring Sect, all she had to do was issue commands via that bracelet of hers and force Nie Tian to do as she said. Why would she do such a thing?

He suspected that she had ulterior motives.

Dong Li let out a cold snort, raging hatred appearing on her gorgeous face. “Of course I’m serious! I wanted to have a fair battle with you when we were in the Realm of Split Void. However, all you did was escape and kill my subordinates. You didn’t have the courage to fight me fair and square. I was very disappointed.”

Nie Tian smiled coldly. “Back when we were in the dense forest, we could have had a sound battle if your men hadn’t rushed to your aid. The whole Void Illusion Mountain Range was filled with members of the Fang. How could I not leave?”

“Very well.” The look in Dong Li’s eye grew increasingly frigid. “Now we’re alone. You can attack me freely. But you’ve got to hurry though. If you fail to capture me by the time Han Mu arrives with your grandfather and the others, don’t blame me for not being polite to them.”

Dong Li, who had suffered repeated losses from Nie Tian, wouldn’t be satisfied with breaking Nie Tian in effortless ways.

If it were someone else, she probably wouldn’t even want to

make an effort. Considering she had the leverage now, with a single command, she would be able to watch the man suffer.

However, Nie Tian was different to her.

She had long since taken Nie Tian as a challenge, one she didn't plan to deal with using her usual means.

Only by inflicting serious pain on Nie Tian with her own strength could she let Nie Tian taste the flavor of a absolute defeat, and she would get to vent her rage.

“As you wish!” With a long roar, Nie Tian expanded his shrunken chaotic magnetic field to cover a ten meter radius around him.

The tall bushes enveloped by the magnetic field started to rattle and explode into shreds.

Fine rain was still drizzling down as a two-meter-long blade light suddenly extended out from the Flame Star in Nie Tian's hand.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

Like a spirit snake, the blade light wiggled at the tip of the Flame Star, thrumming with various types of fierce spiritual power.

SHEW!

The blade light split the falling rain and slashed towards Dong Li's face.

Meanwhile, Dong Li was enveloped by Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field. Every plant and bit of vegetation around her was reduced to flying shreds.

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

Every time the blade light swished down , Dong Li managed to ward it off precisely with her bone shield.

The area around Dong Li was quickly filled with sparks created by the contacts, and her internal spiritual power began to rush around inside of her.

However, she didn't move a bit, and not the slightest panic appeared in her eyes.

Even though her cultivation base was only at the early Greater Heaven stage, slightly higher than Nie Tian's, she managed to ward off Nie Tian's raging attacks and hold her ground in his chaotic magnetic field at the same time, which Guan Yue, a Qi warrior at the middle Greater Heaven stage, had failed to do!

Sneering, Dong Li took a deep breath. "Is this all you've got, the man who received legacies from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace?!"

"Let me show you how powerful our clan's Beast Spirit Incantation is!"

She pursed her sexy lips and let out a animal-like shriek.

A thick pillar of pitch-black spiritual light suddenly beamed into the heavens from behind her back. As it did, the aura Dong Li released into her surroundings went through a overwhelming change.

Under Nie Tian's amazed gaze, the pillar of spiritual light started to morph.

In a few seconds, an enormous, black phoenix came to shape and spread its huge wings.

The black phoenix seemed as if it were forged out of a black metal. With a few flutters of its wings, the heaven and earth around it were filled with a boundless and ancient energy.

As that happened, Nie Tian started to lose control of the chaotic magnetic field he had summoned all sorts of spiritual power to form.

"Beast Spirit Incantation!" Nie Tian exclaimed.

He suddenly remembered the battle between him and Dong Baijie when they had encountered each other for the first time in the

Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace during the Heaven Gate trial.

Back then, Dong Baijie had gone through a series of tough battles, and he only had about ten or twenty percent of his spiritual power left in him.

Even so, a pillar of gray smoke had shot up from the top of his head, which had then morphed into a gigantic gray wolf and started inflicting pain on him.

The reason why he had managed to beat Dong Baijie was that Dong Baijie had suffered too many injuries and consumed too much of his strength.

When Dong Baijie had given up the Heaven Gate pattern on the back of his hand, he had said to Nie Tian that if he had been in a better condition, Nie Tian wouldn't stand a chance fighting him one on one.

Thinking about Dong Baijie's vicious gray wolf and looking at the black phoenix fluttering its wings above Dong Li's head, Nie Tian instantly realized that this was a formidable incantation that people from the Dong Clan practiced.

His speculation was correct.

The number of spirit beasts in the Realm of a Hundred Battles roughly equaled the total number of spirit beasts in the other eight realms. The Dong Clan had been the among the first pioneers to come to the Realm of a Hundred Battles and explore.

Generations of the Dong Clan had gone through countless battles against spirit beasts in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, from which they had gradually developed and mastered a unique incantation: the Beast Spirit Incantation!

The Beast Spirit Incantation allowed members of the Dong Clan to refine spirit beasts' blood and spirits, and use them to condense a beast spirit inside their bodies.

Dong Baijie's gray wolf and Dong Li's black phoenix were both

beast spirits formed with the refined blood and spirit of formidable spirit beasts.

The stronger the spirit beast was, the stronger the beast spirit would be.

Dong Li had formed her beast spirit from the blood and spirit of a sixth grade black phoenix, whose strength equaled that of a Profound realm human Qi warrior. After powerful experts from the Dong Clan had helped her kill the black phoenix, Dong Li had refined it into a beast spirit using the Beast Spirit Incantation, and sealed it inside of her.

As her cultivation base advanced, she was able to refine new beast spirits and seal them inside of her as well.

As her strength grew, she would be able to display the strength of her beast spirits better. By the time she was able to fully display the strength of her beast spirits, or her own strength exceeded her beast spirits' original bloodline strength, she would be able to discard them and hunt for more powerful ones.

The reason why she had gone to the Realm of Split Void had been to accumulate her own strength and temper her subordinates' battle prowess, since she understood that only when she entered the Greater Heaven stage would she be able to fully display the might of her black phoenix beast spirit without suffering a backlash.

It was her black phoenix beast spirit's fully explored strength that had given her the courage to cast her bracelet aside and fight Nie Tian head-on.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

As the black phoenix behind Dong Li continued to flutter its wings, it created black gales that flattened the one-man-tall bushes in the vicinity.

Even Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field flickered due to the black

gales and hardly had any influence on Dong Li.

Smiling, Dong Li fixed her black pupils on Nie Tian.

Holding the bone shield in one hand and the cyan awl in the other, her attractive body slowly rose into the air.

She came to a stop when she was one meter above the ground and floated there.

Nie Tian's pupils contracted as his expression grew increasingly grim.

Normally speaking, only Qi warriors who had entered the Profound realm would have the ability to soar through the air without assistance.

He had heard that some people were able to float in the air with the help of their special spiritual tools before they had reached the Profound realm.

However, he had never met such a person.

Dong Li was the first person he had ever met who was able to float in the air before reaching the Profound realm.

She relied on her black phoenix beast spirit to accomplish that.

SHEW!

With a low sneer, Dong Li's curvaceous body suddenly flew towards Nie Tian with the black phoenix's support, her face filled with arrogance and mockery.

As the violent gales beat her to Nie Tian, Nie Tian found it difficult to even maintain his footing.

He had already canceled the chaotic magnetic field around him. With cold snort, he channeled the various types of spiritual power from his spiritual sea into the Flame Star, with which he split the strong wind and slashed towards Dong Li.

CLANK! CLANK!

Sparks sputtered everywhere as Nie Tian and Dong Li exchanged attacks in close quarters.

Even though the bone shield in Dong Li's left hand flickered violently every time the Flame Star slammed into it, her cyan awl could always slide through the narrowest space in Nie Tian's defense and pierce towards his vital parts like a spirit snake.

Nie Tian, on the other hand, moved about rapidly to avoid the cyan awl and attack Dong Li with the Flame Star from different angles.

Time after time, Nie Tian sprung into the air and landed on the ground.

Within a few dozen seconds, his Flame Star made hundreds of exchanges with Dong Li's bone shield and cyan awl.

Soon, he started to experience numbness in the web between his thumb and forefinger. Every time the Flame Star made contact with Dong Li's spiritual tools, Nie Tian felt as if he were hacking into a mountain made of iron. Not once had he felt an advantage in physical strength.

While fighting, Dong Li constantly flexed and straightened her seemingly soft body, unleashing terrifyingly pure strength.

As tough as Nie Tian's body was, he would shake violently when his fist strike made contact with Dong Li's elbow.

Gradually, Nie Tian had a feeling as if he weren't fighting a human lady, but rather an ancient, female beast!

Chapter 403: Soaring Black Phoenix

BOOM!

As Nie Tian once again landed heavily on the ground, he looked up at the floating Dong Li, his eyes narrowed, and his expression grim.

Thanks to his Heaven Eyes' keen perception, he could feel that the aura Dong Li released into her surroundings was clearly mixed with a mysterious force from the black phoenix.

It was obvious that there was an outside force inside of her.

It was none other than that mysterious force that had greatly boosted her battle prowess and fighting aura.

"What a fierce woman!" Nie Tian felt increasingly amazed.

At that moment, as he once again slammed his Flame Star into Dong Li's bone shield, she lifted her muscular but slender left leg and kicked Nie Tian in his lower abdomen at lightning speed.

BOOM!

Nie Tian, who had just exploded into the air, seemed as if he were hit by a metal war chariot, and fell to the ground.

A wisp of blood flowed out of the corner of Nie Tian's mouth.

PUFF!

A mouthful of blood suddenly escaped his mouth. Nie Tian's expression grew unprecedentedly grim as his Flame Star-bearing arm was covered in bulging veins.

Only as of this moment did he wake up to the truth that, having drawn on the black phoenix's strength, Dong Li's battle prowess had gone far beyond her cultivation base.

Even if she hadn't used tricks to lure that Qi warrior from the Realm of Black Marsh to approach her, she would have had no

problem beating him fair and square.

All she had needed to do was draw on her beast spirit's strength.

But clearly, Dong Li hadn't considered that man as a worthy opponent at all. Therefore, she hadn't used any of the black phoenix's strength, but rather finished him quickly with a trick.

"The clock is ticking, Nie Tian." Dong Li was wreathed in a sphere of dark spiritual power, giving her the look of a blossoming devilish flower.

The enormous, black phoenix was still fluttering its wings behind her, and still hadn't attacked Nie Tian directly.

Floating in midair, Dong Li looked down at Nie Tian, a taunting smile appearing at the corner of her mouth, a devilish light glittering in her pitch-black pupils.

She didn't forget to take the time to crush Nie Tian's spirit during their fierce battle. "I haven't gone all-out yet. If this is all you've got, then you'd better be prepared to watch your grandfather and aunt die."

It seems that she intended to crush Nie Tian in every possible way, so that whenever Nie Tian thought of her in the future, he would relive the utter defeat and sense of helplessness.

She needed to destroy Nie Tian!

As Dong Li stopped to taunt him, Nie Tian took the opportunity to scan the vicinity with his Heaven Eyes.

Frowning, he discovered that Han Mu and a few powerful experts from the Dong Clan were leading the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect closer and closer to Black Water Lake.

He even discovered that Luo Xin, who had stayed on Black Water Lake's shore, was now being watched by a handful of Dong Clan members.

He estimated the time he had inwardly...

Soon, he reached the conclusion that it would take Han Mu and the others no more than a quarter hour to arrive by Black Water Lake.

“I only have a quarter hour left,” He muttered to himself.

Then, he summoned all of his seven Heaven Eyes to where he was, and he no longer kept watch on what was happening in the vicinity, not even what was happening to his grandfather and the others from the Cloudsoaring Sect.

He assumed a tight grip on the Flame Star with his right hand, while his empty left hand started to shine with dazzling starlight.

In the next moment, he splayed his left hand, and starsparks that were as bright as the stars in the heavens appeared in his palm one after another.

By the time there were five starsparks floating above his palm, he didn't stop, but rather continued to condense star power.

Back when he had been in the Realm of Split Void, limited by his cultivation base, he had only been able to form five starsparks.

However, now that he had advanced to the late Heaven stage, the stardew in his vortex of star power was much purer and richer than when he had been in the Realm of Split Void.

FIZZ!

As Nie Tian continued to condense his star power, a sixth starspark gradually came to shape in his palm.

As soon as it appeared, the six starsparks started rotating at a high speed before a brand-new formation was eventually formed.

Illuminated by the six starsparks, Nie Tian's left arm seemed to be painted with a layer of bright starlight. A moment later, his entire left arm turned silvery-white and was given a metallic luster.

“This must be a secret magic he picked up from the Ancient

Fragmentary Star Palace!” Gazing curiously at his left arm and the six shining starsparks, Dong Li wasn’t in a hurry to launch her attacks, as if she were intentionally waiting for him to gather his star power.

At this moment, the three groups of explorers had already been cleared from the area by members of the Dong Clan.

Luo Xin, who was a significant distance from Nie Tian, didn’t have her own Heaven Eyes, and thus didn’t have a clue regarding what was happening between Nie Tian and Dong Li.

However, another group of people had arrived quietly.

Their leader was Qin Yan from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, the girl who had taken Nie Tian to the Cloudsoaring Sect’s residence in the Realm of a Hundred Battles when he had first arrived.

Standing beside her were six Qi warriors from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce.

A member of the Dong Clan appeared in front of Qin Yan and asked, “What brings you here, Miss Qin?”

Wearing a long, green dress and light makeup, Qin Yan constantly looked off towards the area where Nie Tian and Dong Li were fighting with her bright, watery eyes. “I received word that some unforeseen event occurred around Black Water Lake. Also, I have urgent matters to discuss with Dong Li. I can sense people fighting over there. Is that Dong Li?”

Qin Yan’s cultivation base was at the late Greater Heaven stage, which was even higher than Dong Li’s. Therefore, she sensed the terrifying aura unleashed by the black phoenix as soon as she arrived by Black Water Lake.

She was well-aware that the black phoenix was Dong Li’s beast spirit.

However, she found it hard to understand that she would

actually fight someone in the Dong Clan's territory.

Normally, whenever Dong Li viewed someone as an eyesore, all she would need to do was call upon the patrol teams in the vicinity, and they would take care of the rest.

Why in the world would she summon her black phoenix beast spirit?

The more she thought about it, the odder she found it.

The member of the Dong Clan seemed to know that she was close to Dong Li. He nodded and said, "You're right. Miss Dong is over there."

"Alright, I'll go talk to her," Qin Yan said.

"Umm... I'm afraid she can't talk now." The member of the Dong Clan seemed to be in a dilemma, as his gaze shifted to those who had come with Qin Yan.

"Alright, you stay here. I'll go over there by myself." Qin Yan commanded the members of the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce she had brought with her to stay, and before the member of the Dong Clan in front of her granted her access, she blurred into a flash and shot off.

"Miss Qin! Miss Qin!!" The member of the Dong Clan shouted, hoping to stop her, yet Qin Yan rapidly disappeared into the distance.

WHOOSH!

Several dozen seconds later, Qin Yan suddenly appeared in front of Nie Tian and Dong Li.

Dong Li, who was floating in midair with her black phoenix behind her, was taken aback upon seeing her. "Qin Yan? What are you doing here?"

After stopping her dashing momentum, Qin Yan saw Nie Tian and blurted, her face filled with surprise, "It's you! Wu Tian!"

“Wu Tian?” Dong Li snorted coldly, a sneer appearing at the corner of her mouth. Then she turned to Qin Yan and said, “What made you come such a long way to find me here?”

“I’ve got to talk to you about some urgent business,” Qin Yan said.

“Give me a moment.” Dong Li waved at her, beckoning her not to interrupt her battle against Nie Tian. “Wait for me at the perimeter. This is between me and him”

“Can I stay and watch?” Qin Yan laughed softly.

“No!” Dong Li shot her a hard look.

Qin Yan secretly examined Nie Tian with her bright, watery eyes, as she became increasingly curious about him.

The Flame Star in Nie Tian’s right hand, the six starsparks floating in his left palm, and the odd changes to his left arm made Qin Yan wonder.

However, she couldn’t figure out Nie Tian’s real identity.

“Qin Yan!” Dong Li called out in her womanly voice, looking somewhat upset. “Wait for me outside, will you? I’ve got some personal issues to settle with him, and I don’t want to be interrupted!”

After a pause, she added, “Not even by you.”

“Oh, alright.” Qin Yan nodded as she gazed at Nie Tian with a strange expression, as if she had picked up something. “I shall leave you to it then.”

With these words, Qin Yan walked away from this region.

However, the strange look in her eyes right before she left made Dong Li suspicious about her intentions.

“You’re running out of time!” shouted Dong Li.

The black phoenix behind her seemed to let out a soundless

screech, and a surge of raging, dark spiritual power suddenly spread out with her as the center.

CRACKLE! CRACKLE! CRACKLE!

Wherever the dark spiritual power spread, the ground cracked open, and strange sounds filled the air.

As the dark spiritual power swept across the grassland, the blast shredded the grass and sent it flying everywhere.

Facing the incoming torrential, dark spiritual power, the six starsparks in Nie Tian's left hand morphed into a streak of starlight and shot forward.

The formation they formed seemed to have evolved into a miniature nebula. Dazzling starlight constantly flashed within it, channeling the power between starsparks and multiplying the might of the formation.

BOOM!

As the formation of starsparks made contact with the surge of dark spiritual power, an uncanny force, which seemed to originate from the deepest parts of the starry river in the sky, burst forth from within the mysterious formation.

The dark spiritual power that came like a flood was instantly penetrated by the starlight unleashed by the formation of starsparks.

The black phoenix behind Dong Li let out a loud screech for the first time, and its eyes, which Nie Tian hadn't even noticed until now, suddenly lit up.

Chapter 404: A Frustrating Failure

The black phoenix stared coldly at Nie Tian with its red, narrow eyes.

The intense indifference towards life in its eyes made Nie Tian's blood run cold.

The moment the black phoenix snapped open its eyes, the dark spiritual power, which had been penetrated by the fierce light emanated by the formation of starsparks, once again became watertight.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Like a raging flood, the dark spiritual power submerged Nie Tian in the blink of an eye.

Nie Tian's expression flickered as he made attempts to reform his chaotic magnetic field, standing in the middle of the torrential dark spiritual power.

However, every time his chaotic magnetic field began to form, the bizarre, dark spiritual power would rip his gathering power to shreds, like a shoal of ferocious fish.

Bit by bit, the dark spiritual power gradually infused a cold, bleak aura through Nie Tian's pores and into his flesh and blood.

Dong Li, whose eyes shone with devilish light, slowly floated towards Nie Tian.

With every inch she approached, the dark spiritual power grew more intense, making Nie Tian feel as if he had been thrown into a world of frigid coldness. Even his blood and flesh seemed to be gradually freezing and losing their vigor.

An aura that could extinguish all living creatures and wither all plants spread out along with the dark spiritual power.

"It seems that you haven't mastered all the magics you've

obtained from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace yet.” Dong Li’s tone was indifferent. She seemed sexy and gorgeous as she floated closer to Nie Tian. However, the expression on her face was grim and frosty. “Don’t think that you’re the only talented person in this heaven and earth, Nie Tian. In the Domain of the Falling Stars alone, there were quite a few talented chosen ones whose battle prowess can’t be measured by their cultivation bases.

“Even though I don’t consider myself very talented, my cultivation base doesn’t do justice to my actual battle prowess.

“You’ve got to understand that you only managed to take the second fragmentary star mark from my older brother because he had already gone through a number of fierce battles and was far from his peak state, not because you’re so awesome and special. You were just lucky!

“Don’t tell me that you really think you’re invincible.”

She still hadn’t forgotten to taunt Nie Tian, hoping to break Nie Tian with her words.

She, who had boundless battle experience, knew that sometimes verbal attacks could be even more effective and hurtful than physical attacks.

“...Chosen one?” Nie Tian muttered in a low voice, a hint of smile appearing at the corner of his mouth. “Indeed, talented chosen ones like you are hard to find, but I’ve met a handful. What do you think of Ning Yang? You better than him?”

“Ning Yang?!” Dong Li was taken aback.

At that very moment, Nie Tian threw his head back and let out a broad laugh as the Flame Dragon Armor flew out of his bracelet of holding.

As a thought appeared in his mind, the Flame Dragon Armor circled around in the air and descended from above his head.

In the next moment, Nie Tian was clad in the Flame Dragon

Armor, which unleashed blazing flames into his surroundings.

Fizzing sounds echoed out around Nie Tian as the overwhelming dark spiritual power around him was burned away by the flames unleashed by the Flame Dragon Armor.

As Nie Tian was no longer afflicted by the intense coldness in his flesh and blood, pure and refined flesh power originating from the spirit beast meat he had devoured earlier began to roam inside of him.

THUMP! THUMP!

As his heart started pounding, the dark spiritual power that had been plaguing his flesh and blood was driven out of his body like a mist blown away by a gust of wind.

He could no longer feel any sort of discomfort.

WHOOSH!

Nie Tian's spiritual power, flame power, wood power, star power, and flame power suddenly rushed into the Flame Star in his hand.

Infused with so many types of power, the Flame Star started to shake violently.

In the meantime, an endless rage was born in Nie Tian's heart. Then, he gathered his strength the way he had launched a Rage Punch before, and used it to stimulate the Flame Star.

Unprecedentedly, various types of power merged into the Flame Star, where they were enhanced by the mysterious internal spell formations and eventually broke out.

A thick and long blade light that was mixed with as many types of power as Nie Tian possessed shot towards Dong Li.

As that happened, Nie Tian found that half of his strength had been absorbed by the Flame Star!

Meanwhile, a mysterious door seemed to be opened in the depths

of the dark, clouded heavens that was an unknowable distance away from this realm.

A Titan's furious roar seemed to ring out from it.

The terrifying blade light, wreathed in torrential rage, shredded the ward created by the dark spiritual power and shot towards Dong Li like a brilliant ribbon.

Dong Li was flabbergasted.

Capable of communicating with the black phoenix on a psychic level, she could tell that the black phoenix had sensed danger and become uneasy.

The black phoenix's sharp and violent cry, which was only audible to her, thundered in her mind.

Upon Dong Li's summons, the dark spiritual power, which had been scattered by Nie Tian's blade light, once again came together and morphed into an enormous, translucent, black egg, sealing Dong Li and her black phoenix within.

CRUNCH!

As the thick and long blade light slammed into the translucent black egg, fine fissures instantly appeared around the contact point.

Inside the huge egg, Dong Li shuddered slightly, her face turning grim.

Meanwhile, the black phoenix's red, narrow eyes shone with suffocating, blood-colored light.

WHOOSH!

After unleashing the blade light, Nie Tian infused the Flame Dragon Armor with his rich flesh power and what remained of his flame power.

Wearing the Flame Dragon Armor, Nie Tian seemed to instantly turn into a burning giant, and charged directly into the cracked,

huge, translucent egg.

As he did, patterns of flames wriggled on the Flame Dragon Armor's surface, as if they were formed by rivers of flowing lava.

In the meantime, an incomparably fierce flame power, which seemed to belong to the Flame Dragon Armor itself, burst out of its Blood Core.

Like a huge, burning cannon ball, Nie Tian ramming into the translucent black egg with full force.

BOOOOOM!

Upon impact, the cracked egg finally shattered and exploded.

Pieces of egg shell formed by dark spiritual power shot in every direction like blades of black light, before piercing into the earth, leaving deep holes.

Dong Li let out a muffled groan as an unnatural redness appeared on her devilish, gorgeous face.

The large, black phoenix immediately flew down to the ground, where it wrapped Dong Li in its immeasurably wide wings and rose back up into the air.

Nie Tian landed with a loud crash after lunging into air and ramming into the huge egg.

While he was about to leap forward and search for Dong Li with the Flame Star in his hand, he found that she had already been carried dozens of meters into the sky by her black phoenix.

The black phoenix spread its wings, and Dong Li appeared again.

Utterly discomfited, she was about to gather her strength and launch a counterattack. However, at that very moment, Han Mu's shouts rang out, "Miss! I've brought those people from the Cloudsoaring Sect here for you!"

Dong Li went blank.

Looking up at her, Nie Tian's eyes were filled with frustration when he heard Han Mu's voice.

He hadn't expected that time would have passed so quickly.

Before he knew it, the agreed time was up, and he had failed to capture Dong Li before Han Mu arrived with the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect. He was mad at himself for missing his chance.

"Oh, the agreed time is up..." Dong Li muttered in a low voice as she came to her senses.

"Miss! Why didn't you reply to my messages?" Han Mu asked the moment he rushed over.

However, upon seeing Dong Li, who was slowly descending from the sky with her black phoenix, his expression flickered dramatically as he turned to glower at Nie Tian, blurting, "You actually dare to force our miss to summon that black phoenix?! Do you not know where you are, Nie Tian?! I bet you don't know that we have your family!"

Nie Tian didn't say a word, but instead fixed his eyes on Dong Li.

After Dong Li landed, the black phoenix morphed into a shapeless shadow and slowly disappeared into her.

"It's over," Dong Li said in a low voice.

However, not a smidgen of pleasure could be seen on her face, the kind a bet-winner should have.

Dong Li reached out and pointed in the direction where he and the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect had come from, and ordered, "You go over there first. No one comes here without my summons, not you, not those people from the Cloudsoaring Sect."

Han Mu obeyed Dong Li unconditionally. Even though he didn't understand the reason behind her demand, he withdrew obediently.

Dong Li stepped towards Nie Tian, gazing at him with a frown.

She fixed her appearance while she pondered how she should deal with Nie Tian and the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect.

WHOOSH!

She reached out with one hand, and the bracelet for communication flew into her palm. Then, she put it around her wrist.

Just as she wrestled with how she should deal with Nie Tian and the others, Qin Yan popped up again.

“The sounds of your battle were really loud.” Qin Yan’s eyes were filled with a strange look as her gaze switched back and forth between Dong Li and Nie Tian. “I came over as soon as I sensed that your battle had ended.”

As she spoke, her gaze found Nie Tian frequently.

Even though she still didn’t know who Nie Tian was, she was increasingly curious about this young man, who had managed to tie with Dong Li, who had fully mastered her black phoenix’s strength, while he was only at the late Heaven stage.

She tried to match him to the chosen ones from the ancient Qi warrior sects throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars.

However, she soon realized that none of those she knew matched Nie Tian.

Chapter 405: A New Plan

Qin Yan was a member of the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, which had countless ties with the mysterious Spirit Condor.

Since the Spirit Condor was the most well-informed organization throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars, as a core member of the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, Qin Yan had knowledge about almost every talented youngster in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

However, the young man before her didn't seem to be among them.

“Who is he exactly?” Qin Yan asked, deeply intrigued.

Dong Li still hadn't decided how she would deal with Nie Tian and the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect, so she decided to put that matter on hold and figure out why Qin Yan had come first. She turned to Nie Tian and said, “I'll deal with you later. You can go and meet those people from the Cloudsoaring Sect, but I forbid you to leave Black Water Lake.”

Without saying a word, Nie Tian immediately sped off towards the area where the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect were gathered.

Dong Li held her bracelet to her red lips and whispered orders into it, instructing Han Mu and his men not to stop Nie Tian from reuniting with his family and friends, but confine them to where they were and keep a close watch on every move Nie Tian and the others made.

The moment Nie Tian left, Qin Yan asked, a strange expression her face, “Who the hell is he, Li? That guy's cultivation base is lower than yours, but he managed to battle you for so long without being at a disadvantage. That was very impressive. I bet he's not a

nobody. However, I can't figure out who he is, no matter how hard I try."

Even though Dong Li was close friends with her, she didn't intend to reveal the truth to her.

An agitated expression filled Dong Li's singularly beautiful face as she said, "Enough about him. What made you come to me so urgently?"

"I received word that a group of people from the Realm of Black Marsh are killing other explorers in this area, in your clan's territory," Qin Yan said.

"They've already been taken care of," Dong Li said without thinking.

Qin Yan nodded gently, seemingly unsurprised. "Yeah, now that I've found you here, near Black Water Lake, I figured you'd already taken care of them. I just heard that your subordinate, Han Mu, escorted a team of Cloudsoaring Sect members here, is that true?"

"Yes, it is."

"It's good news that they're okay. You'd better arrange for people to escort them back to Water Moon City as soon as possible. The Yin Sect and the Yang Sect from the Realm of a Thousand Devastations asked us to find those people and make sure they return to the Realm of Flame Heaven safely." Qin Yan sounded very serious.

"The Yin Sect and the Yang Sect asked you to do that?" Dong Li was taken aback.

Not only were the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations by no means weaker than the Dong Clan, but they also had close relationships with the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce. Now that they had asked the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce to do them a favor, the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce would surely give them face.

“As you know,” Qin Yan explained, “that Nie Tian from the Realm of Flame Heaven went to the Realm of a Thousand Devastations not long ago, and sealed that spatial rift for them. Every Qi warrior sect in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations is quite grateful for what he did. After learning that he is a member of the Cloudsoaring Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven, and his dearest family are currently in your clan’s territory, they...”

Qin Yan suddenly stopped.

Her bright eyes lit up as lightning seemed to flash across her mind.

“Wu Tian... Wu Tian is Nie Tian, right?!” Qin Yan suddenly came to realize the truth. Looking in the direction Nie Tian had left, she asked, “He’s the one who obtained the legacies from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, isn’t he?!”

She tapped her own forehead and smiled embarrassedly. “I should have known that it was him. When he first came to Water Moon City, Liu Ling from the Yin Sect came with him. There are only a handful of male disciples in the entire Yin Sect. And Liu Ling’s attitude towards him was surprisingly pleasant and polite. She even asked me to show him to the Cloudsoaring Sect’s residence in Water Moon City.”

“Alright...” Dong Li said with a reluctant tone. “It seems that I can’t hide it from you after all.”

She knew that Qin Yan was very smart. Considering she had just caught them in the middle of a battle, it would only be a matter of time before she figured out that Wu Tian was none other than Nie Tian, who had recently become a household name throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars.

“Then why did you get into a battle with him?” Qin Yan was confused.

“He offended me in the Realm of Split Void!” Dong Li gritted her

teeth as she said these words.

Qin Yan's mind wondered briefly before she snapped to her senses and called out, "He's the Hua Tian you met in the Realm of Split Void, isn't he?"

"Who else can it be?" Dong Li said with a cold snort.

Qin Yan felt that all the dots had connected.

Since she had been close with Dong Li, she even knew about Dong Li's tempering trip to the Realm of Split Void, where she had disguised herself as the leader of the Fang.

She had also heard from Dong Li's mouth that this Hua Tian person had tampered with her plans and humiliated her in the Realm of Split Void.

She had gone to see Dong Li soon after her return to the Realm of a Hundred Battles. She could still recall Dong Li's face being filled with rage upon mentioning the name "Hua Tian".

"Wu Tian, Hua Tian, Nie Tian..." Qin Yan shook her head and burst into laughter. "This guy is really uncreative when it comes to assumed names."

Dong Li looked rather grim as she apparently recalled what Nie Tian had done.

"Did you plan to use those people from the Cloudsoaring Sect against Nie Tian?" Qin Yan came to realize what Dong Li planned to do, and thus advised, "I don't think that would be appropriate. Nie Tian has recently helped save the Realm of a Thousand Devastations. Every sect in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations is very grateful for what he did. The Yin Sect and the Yang Sect even jeopardized their relationships with the Heaven Palace Sect by supporting his decisions.

"Even though the Cloudsoaring Sect is rather weak, the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect are ancient sects with deep-rooted strength.

“If you kill Nie Tian’s family to get back at him, the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect surely won’t let you off, especially now that they’ve already asked us to help them find and secure them. If you ignore all that and kill them anyways, you’ll probably get the entire Dong Clan in trouble. Even your patriarch might be stirred because of it.”

“I know this is a bit tricky.” Dong Li’s eyes turned as she weighed her choices inwardly.

Qin Yan knew that Dong Li was independent and full of tricks, so she didn’t think she needed to say more than that. Therefore, she said, “There’s another thing I’ve come to talk to you about. Cao Qiushui discovered a relic of the Phantasms in the Realm of Dark Underworld. He plans to invite some people to explore that area with him. He came to me and asked me to find out if you’re interested.”

“What the hell was that dumbass doing in the Realm of Dark Underworld?” Dong Li seemed surprised.

Qin Yan smiled. “You know him. His only hobby is to explore unknown places, even though he’s gotten into a lot of trouble doing that over the years. However, I’ve been to some of those places with him, and gained quite a fortune. Those were some fun trips we took together.

“According to him, there are only a handful of people who know about this relic in the Realm of Dark Underworld. After all, the Realm of Dark Underworld isn’t our territory. People from the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect are everywhere. He only asked us to go because he was worried that it wouldn’t be safe if he went alone.”

“Who else is going?” Dong Li asked.

“That person from the Gu Clan and that other person from the Pill Pavilion Sect,” Qin Yan answered.

“When does the team leave?”

“In seven days. I was only so eager to find you because the team is leaving very soon.”

“Alright, I’m in.” With these words, the tip of Dong Li’s eyebrow rose as an idea suddenly occurred to her. Then, she turned to Qin Yan and asked, “What do you think of Nie Tian?”

“What do you mean?” Qin Yan asked, looking surprised.

“His battle prowess, of course.”

“The fact that he was able to stay alive while facing you and your black phoenix proves that he’s quite good.”

Dong Li cracked a smile, her eyes shining with a delighted light. “Don’t say anything to the Yin Sect or the Yang Sect. Just pretend you don’t know anything about me and Nie Tian. I’ll arrange for those people from the Cloudsoaring Sect to return to the Realm of Flame Heaven, but I’ll force Nie Tian to go with us. He’s good in battle and full of wicked ideas. Plus, he has a uniquely strong sensing ability. He should be able to help us in many aspects.

“Also, that guy offended me. I need to keep him by my side so that I can take my time torturing him after this!”

With a hearty smile, Qin Yan nodded and said, “Sure, I can do that, considering our relationship. However, people who play with fire usually get burned. I can tell that that guy isn’t that easily handled. You’d better not get tangled with him.”

Dong Li let out a cold harrumph. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that I’m afraid that you will suffer more losses from him,” Qin Yan said with a smile.

A disdainful expression filled Dong Li’s face. “Who? Him?! I’ve beaten everyone at mind games since the day I started my cultivation path. I don’t see how that Nie Tian is any different from the other men I’ve outmaneuvered.”

“But when you were in the Realm of Split Void, didn’t you...?” Of all the pots, Qin Yan went for the pot that didn’t boil. (idiom: Qin Yan touched a sore spot by mentioning that, instead of any other matter).

“That was because I hadn’t fully mastered the black phoenix’s strength back then!” Dong Li interrupted her and shot her a nasty look. Before she could say anything, Dong Li added, “Alright, I don’t want to hear anymore of that nonsense. I’ll force Nie Tian to go to the Realm of Dark Underworld with us. You just pretend that he’s a guest elder of my clan, and don’t tell anyone his real identity.”

“Umm, okay.”

“We’ll give him some time to catch up with his family and friends. I’ll go over there and settle this matter with him in an hour, and then I’ll arrange for his family and friends to leave for the Realm of the Flame Heaven.”

“You’re quite a crafty woman.”

“Right back at you.”

Chapter 406: Deal

Luo Xin was brought to another location by Black Water Lake, where Han Mu and a number of Dong Clan members watched the team from the Cloudsoaring Sect.

Upon seeing Luo Xin, Zhao Yuan and the others were all thrilled. They hurried forward to ask her why she had come to this place.

However, before she had time to explain, Nie Tian found his way to this location with the help of his Heaven Eyes.

As soon as he arrived, Han Mu, who had already received Dong Li's command, led his men away to give Nie Tian and the people from the Cloudsoaring Sect some space, so that they could communicate without scruples.

With a smile at the corner of her mouth, Luo Xin pointed at Nie Tian, who had assumed a different appearance, though his eyes had been filled with excitement since the moment he had come along. She said, "Mr. Nie, guess who this is."

Nie Donghai was rather confused upon seeing this stranger coming directly towards him after appearing in his sight.

Before he could figure out what was happening, Nie Tian ripped his mask off with one quick motion and called out, "Grandfather! Aunt!"

Shocked and ecstatic, Nie Donghai and Nie Qian were at a loss for words. "Little Tian!"

Jiang Lingzhu, Ye Gumo, and the others also exclaimed his name, their eyes shining with the light of incredibility. "Nie Tian!"

They had never imagined that they would see Nie Tian here, by Black Water Lake in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, after he had been gone for more than two years.

Nie Donghai's body trembled slightly as he rushed forward, his

eyes welling up.

He was never known as a person who liked smiling. However, his cheeks now twitched a few times before a wry smile appeared on his face. He patted Nie Tian's shoulder with his slightly stiffened right hand and said in a voice filled with joy, "You're a grown man now, even taller than me already."

Tears glittered in Nie Qian's reddened eyes as she said, "You little punk, where the hell have you been all these years?"

Nie Donghai shot a stern look at her. "Hey! Don't say the word hell before me ever again! Don't speak at all if you don't know how to speak properly!"

Grievance could be seen on Nie Qian's face as she said, "Sorry... I used the wrong word. Forgive me."

Nie Donghai let out a snort and turned to Nie Tian. With a frown, he asked, "What are you doing here, silly? I heard that you turned the Heaven Palace Sect down. If that's the case, you should have stayed in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations. The Yin Sect and the Yang Sect will do their best to protect you. You shouldn't have left."

Nie Tian smiled like a innocent boy. "I haven't seen you two for too long. I needed to see you."

Seeing that the three of them were finally reunited, Luo Xin gave Zhan Yuan a meaningful look and whispered, "Let's give them some space."

Zhan Yuan nodded and commanded the others to step away from the three of them.

Jiang Lingzhu seemed a bit reluctant as she walked away, as if she were very curious about what Nie Tian had experienced over these years. Nevertheless, standing at a certain distance, she constantly glanced towards Nie Tian and pointed her ears at them, as she was apparently trying to hear what they were talking about.

Zhan Yuan shot a glance at her and said, “You’ve got to work harder, Lingzhu. Nie Tian has already entered the late Heaven stage. From the look of it, it won’t be long before he enters the Greater Heaven stage.”

“Nie Tian is a freak. I don’t want to compare myself with him!” Jiang Lingzhu shook her head.

Zhan Yuan sighed and said with a smile, “You might be right.”

Luo Xin seemed to be in a good mood as she said, “Well, he turned down the Heaven Palace Sect’s offer, and didn’t agree to join the Yin Sect or the Yang Sect. That means he’s still a disciple of the Cloudsoaring Sect.” Then, she showed Zhan Yuan the ring of holding on her hand and continued, “Nie Tian gave me this ring of holding as a gift. No matter how strange and unique he seems, we should be glad that he’s a member of our Sect.”

Eyebrows furrowed, Zhan Yan said, “However, a handful of old men in our sect are like mice that can only see what’s under their noses.” (Idiom: short-sighted)

“Just mentioning them makes me angry.” Luo Xin’s expression turned grim. “If they didn’t target Nie Tian’s family, when Nie Tian returned to the Realm of Flame Heaven, he wouldn’t have gone directly from Black Cloud City to the Blood Sect, instead of going to Cloudsoaring Mountain. If they continue down this road, even if Nie Tian doesn’t join the Heaven Palace Sect, he might be seduced away by that cunning woman from the Blood Sect and become their disciple.”

“Indeed, Li Jing has treated Nie Tian quite nicely, and some of the elders in our sect did drag us down in that aspect.” Zhan Yuan shook his head. “But I hope Nie Tian will let go of those unpleasant matters and stick with our sect for the sake of martial granduncle.”

“Yeah, Nie Tian isn’t a heartless and ungrateful person,” Luo Xin said.

Meanwhile, off to the side...

Nie Tian took a deep breath, and prepared to explain what he had gone through during the past two and a half years after he had left the Realm of Flame Heaven to Nie Donghai and Nie Qian.

However, before he opened his mouth, Nie Donghai shook his head, signaling for him to stop. “Too many outsiders. You just keep what you’ve experienced these years to yourself. Although I’m curious, I’m happy enough to know that you’re safe and healthy, and your cultivation base is improving steadily.”

Nie Tian immediately realized that not only were Zhan Yuan, Luo Xin, and the others standing not far away, but Han Mu and other members of the Dong Clan were also in the vicinity.

Many of his encounters were sensitive and complicated. He surely had better keep them to himself.

“Alright, I see.” He nodded, and took out two rings of holding. With a smile on his face, he handed them to Nie Donghai and Nie Qian separately, and said, “Grandfather, aunt, here’s a little something for you.”

“Rings of holding!” Nie Qian’s eyes lit up.

Nie Donghai didn’t refuse, but rather accepted Nie Tian’s gift delightedly.

They received the rings of holding, scanned them with their psychic awarenesses, and gasped simultaneously.

Not being a shrewd woman, Nie Qian was shocked by the substantial amounts of spiritual materials, spirit stones, and medicinal pills within her ring of holding. “H-how come there are so many spiritual materials and spirit stones in there?! How did you get them, Little Tian?”

Nie Donghai let out a soft sigh. “What do you think? Little Tian must have won them at the risk of his own life.”

Deep down, he was also astonished by the tremendous amounts of spiritual materials, spirit stones, and medicinal pills within the ring of holding. After a brief scan, he realized that the value of these cultivation resources far exceeded the Nie Clan's entire accumulation.

Considering the Nie Clan's strength and influence, they might not even be able to gather such a large fortune in another hundred years.

However, he also made out that those cultivation resources were very heterogeneous, which had obviously come from various origins.

It was evident how Nie Tian had obtained them.

Upon hearing Nie Donghai's words, Nie Qian suddenly fell silent, her expression saddened.

Nie Tian smiled broadly and said, "Hey look, I'm alive and fine, aren't I?"

As a matter of fact, he had prepared those cultivation resources for Nie Donghai and Nie Qian before leaving the Realm of Split Void. Now that he had given them out, he felt greatly relieved, knowing that these years of hard work hadn't been in vain.

Nie Donghai nodded. "Yeah, being alive and healthy is more important than anything else."

The three of them sat down in a circle by Black Water Lake and chatted on. Soon, they wandered onto the topic of the Realm of Flame Heaven.

That was when Nie Tian asked, "Where do you want to go, Grandfather? I heard that some elders from the Cloudsoaring Sect were unfriendly toward you. How about I arrange for someone to take you to the Realm of a Thousand Devastations? Both the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect are willing to take you in. Aside from them, Li Jing from the Blood Sect also gave me her word that, as long as

you want to, you will be welcome to live in the Blood Sect.”

Nie Donghai shook his head. “It won’t be necessary. Your master treats us well. We can’t forget what the Cloudsoaring Sect has done for us and leave just because of a handful of people’s unjust behavior. Now that you’ve sealed the spatial rift in the Realm of Flame Heaven, I don’t think those elders will continue to target me and your aunt.

“Furthermore, your aunt and I won’t need so many cultivation resources. I want to use them to help the kids in our clan so that they’ll have a better chance at advancing to the next level.

“The Nie Clan has been down and weak for so long. Now that we have you and a chance to turn the situation around, I want to do what I can to make up for all those years that my spiritual sea was shattered.”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m thinking too,” Nie Qian chimed in.

“However, it seems that Nie Beichuan and his gang...” Nie Tian didn’t finish his sentence.

“Don’t worry,” Nie Donghai said. “Those are only insignificant matters. I’ll handle them.”

Seeing that Nie Donghai was insistent on returning to the Cloudsoaring Sect and the Nie Clan, Nie Tian didn’t say anything else.

Moments later, Dong Li came along. She raised her chin to look at Nie Tian from a distant location before waving at him and saying, “Will you come over? I need to talk to you.”

Nie Tian’s expression grew grim as he rose to his feet and said to Nie Donghai and Nie Qian, “Give me a second. I’ll be back.”

“Who’s that?” Nie Qian asked.

“The daughter of the Dong Clan’s clanmaster,” Nie Tian said.

“Are you friends with her?” Nie Qian chuckled, sizing Dong Li

up. “That girl is quite a beauty.”

“Yeah... sort of.” Nie Tian didn’t want them to worry about him, so he muddled out an answer and rapidly walked towards Dong Li.

After arriving by Dong Li’s side, he lowered his voice and said, “Alright, let’s settle this. As long as you agree to let my grandfather, aunt, and those members of the Cloudsoaring Sect return to the Realm of Flame Heaven, I’ll do whatever you want me to do.”

“Straightforward! I like it!” Dong Li smiled. “I’ll take you to a place where you’ll help me with a mission. Successful or not, I’ll let your family and friends return to the Realm of Flame Heaven. Sound good?”

Nie Tian was taken aback. “Since when did you become so open to persuasion?”

“What can I say? I’m a nice person by nature.” Dong Li smiled, her tone unprecedentedly gentle. “So what do you say?”

Nie Tian snorted. “You have my family. How can I say no?”

Dong Li nodded. “Smart. We’re on a tight schedule here. You take your family and friends from the Cloudsoaring Sect, and follow me back to my clan now. Once we arrive, I’ll arrange for my people to escort them to Water Moon City, where they can take the other Cloudsoaring Sect members in the city and return to the Realm of Flame Heaven via the inter-realm teleportation portal in the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce.

“But you’ll have to stay.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Fine.”

“Then it’s settled.”

Chapter 407: Separating Again

Traveling with members of the Dong Clan, Nie Tian and the others didn't run into any trouble on their way back to the Dong Clan.

Since Dong Li constantly urged everyone to move faster, the team didn't dare to waste any time, and marched straight back to the Dong Clan within the shortest time possible.

Six days later, they arrived at the Dong Clan's front gate.

During the past six days, he had traveled side by side with Nie Donghai and Nie Qian, and savored the long-lost familial love.

However, the best days were always short. Now that they'd arrived at the Dong Clan, it meant that it was time for them to separate again.

Nie Tian didn't know that since the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect had made requests, Dong Li wouldn't dare to harm him even if he refused to follow Dong Li's orders.

He didn't tell his family or the other members of the Cloudsoaring Sect about his agreement with Dong Li. He just told them that Dong Li was a friend of his.

According to Dong Li's arrangements, Nie Donghai, Nie Qian, and the other Cloudsoaring Sect members were rapidly taken to a teleportation portal in the Dong Clan. Nie Tian went along.

Standing in a location not far away, Dong Li and Qin Yan watched Nie Tian as they whispered something to each other.

"Grandfather, aunt, I need to stay here in the Realm of a Hundred Battles for a little longer," Nie Tian said, reluctance in his eyes. "You go ahead and return to the Realm of Flame Heaven first."

Nie Donghai nodded. "You're a grown man now. I understand

that you have your own business to attend to. Your grandfather won't hold you back. No need to worry about us. We'll take good care of ourselves. You, on the other hand, need to be careful, considering you travel the world by yourself now."

"I will."

"Nie Tian, visit the Cloudsoaring Sect when you have the time," Luo Xin said. "Your master has been worried about you."

Nie Tian smiled. "I surely will. Other than my grandfather and aunt, he's the one I miss the most. If you see him when you get back, tell him that I'm in the wrong for not seeking him out in the Cloudsoaring Sect."

"I'm sure he won't mind, as long as you still remember his kindness," Luo Xin said, smiling.

"Take care." Nie Tian waved his hand as he watched everyone step into the teleportation portal. "I'll return to the Cloudsoaring Sect after I'm finished with the business on my hand. See you!"

"You take care, Nie Tian!"

"Take good care of yourself, Nie Tian!"

The teleportation portal unleashed a misty, bright light that enveloped everyone inside. After a series of spiritual power fluctuations, they disappeared from Nie Tian's sight.

Looking at the empty teleportation portal, Nie Tian seemed rather melancholy. Apparently, he was despondent about once again separating from his family.

Appearing beside him, Dong Li curled her lips and said, "Alright. You're a big boy. Don't grieve like a girl. I traveled across the nine realms in the Domain of the Falling Stars before I was even ten. It's a good thing to travel around. People won't accomplish anything if they just lock themselves up and practice cultivation in a corner of the world."

Qin Yan laughed softly. “Do you think everyone is like you, naughty girl?”

“How are you any different from me?” Dong Li retorted.

Nie Tian took a deep breath to force himself out of his sentimental state. Then, he turned to face the two girls, who were now standing beside him.

Having resumed her actual appearance, Dong Li looked feminine and desirable. Every move she made gave off a charming vibe, making her look like a blossoming rose.

Qin Yan, on the other hand, was dressed in a succinct and graceful fashion. As pretty as a painting, she had a quiet and elegant appearance, and her bright eyes glittered with the light of wisdom.

These two girls were the two most famous beauties in the Realm of a Hundred Battles. Each of them was beautiful in their own way. Their cultivation talent was also very outstanding, which was acknowledged by people throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars.

However, Nie Tian’s heart was taken up by the fact that he was forced to stay and work for Dong Li. Therefore, not the least bit of enjoyment could be seen in his eyes when he looked at them.

Especially Dong Li; he didn’t have the slightest favorable opinion of her.

Back when she had been in the Realm of Split Void, Dong Li had played her vicious tricks and killed countless unwitting explorers in that dense forest in the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

That woman was extremely cunning and vile. When Nie Tian saw her, he saw a scorpion or a serpent. All he could think was that he should be extra vigilant.

“Where do you plan to take me? And what’s the mission?” Nie Tian asked with a frown.

“The Realm of Dark Underworld.” Dong Li didn’t intend to hide the truth from him. “One of my friends found a relic of the Phantasms in the Realm of Dark Underworld, and we’re going to explore it. As you probably know, the Realm of Dark Underworld used to be home to Phantasms. They lived there for a very long time before they were driven out by powerful Qi warriors from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace.”

“The Realm of Dark Underworld?” Nie Tian went blank for a moment before Tang Yang’s name popped up in his mind.

During the Heaven Gate trial, it was none other than Tang Yang from the Flame God Sect who had killed Liu Yan in front of him, which had left an eternal scar in his heart.

Afterwards, when Nie Tian and the chosen ones had ended up in the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, Tang Yang had been Ning Yang’s last opponent in the Greater Heaven section. Even though he eventually lost, he managed to escape from Ning Yang’s hands. He must have returned to the Realm of Dark Underworld.

The only problem was that Tang Yang had been at the late Greater Heaven stage back then. Years had passed, so his cultivation base might have become even stronger.

He had sworn that, once he became strong enough, he would kill Tang Yang to avenge Liu Yan.

However, he didn’t think he had what it took right now.

Considering that everyone now knew that the Flame Dragon Armor was in his possession, once his true identity was exposed when he was in the Realm of Dark Underworld, the Flame God Sect would definitely do everything within their power to get him, especially now that he had already turned the Heaven Palace Sect down.

“What? Do you have a problem with that?” Dong Li asked.

“No.” Nie Tian shook his head and kept his history with Tang

Yang to himself.

“You don’t need to worry. You can continue to disguise yourself as Wu Tian. As long as you’re more careful, no one will be suspicious.” Dong Li assumed that he was worried that the Heaven Palace Sect would seek trouble with him. “If you didn’t set foot in my clan and my subordinate didn’t recognize the mask you’re wearing, I wouldn’t know who you were either.”

“A relic of the Phantasms...” Nie Tian’s expression flickered as he blurted, “You were in the Realm of Split Void too. Did you know that Phantasms appeared in the Realm of Split Void? The Phantasms that descended upon the Realm of Split Void possessed terrifying strength. Could it be that they went from the Realm of Split Void to the Realm of Dark Underworld? After all, the Realm of Dark Underworld used to be their paradise.”

Upon hearing his words, Dong Li and Qin Yan both fell silent.

Before this moment, it had never occurred to them that the two incidents were connected, and the Phantasms that had appeared in the Realm of Split Void could have traveled to the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Only after being reminded by Nie Tian did they remember that Phantasms had indeed been spotted in the Realm of Split Void.

According to the information they had received, those Phantasms had disappeared soon after landing in the Realm of Split Void.

The Blood Skull, Dark Moon, and Wild Fire had searched for a long time, but eventually failed to find them.

“Li, do you think it’s possible that those Phantasms have traveled from the Realm of Split Void to the Realm of Dark Underworld?” Qin Yan asked with a slightly grim expression. “You spent quite some time in the Realm of Split Void. You must have a better idea than I do.”

Dong Li’s expression also grew serious as she said, “I’d say that’s

a possibility. As you know, there are a large number of mysterious spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range in the Realm of Split Void. It's possible that one or two of them lead to the Realm of Dark Underworld. If those Phantasms had acquired such information, they might have indeed traveled from the Realm of Split Void to the Realm of Dark Underworld through one of them."

Qin Yan smiled bitterly. "Do you think we will run into those Phantasms in the Realm of Dark Underworld?"

"There's another thing I need to remind you of," Nie Tian said with a grim expression. "I was there when the first Phantasm landed, and it was that Phantasm that killed Ning Yang. From what I can tell, that Phantasm's strength is probably equal to that of a Worldly realm human Qi warrior! I've no idea how powerful the other Phantasms are."

"But even if you run into that Phantasm alone during your exploration trip, there's no chance that you'll be able to make it out of there alive, considering your strength."

"Is it really so powerful?!" Dong Li asked, surprised.

Qin Yan's expression also flickered slightly.

"I saw it myself. I swear that's the truth. You'd better think it through and see if you really want to explore that relic in the Realm of Dark Underworld. Even if you are determined to go, you'd better make full preparations and invite powerful experts to go together, lest you all die there." Nie Tian painted a rather dangerous picture for the two of them.

"Thank you for the reminders," Qin Yan said, nodding gently. Then, she turned around and said to Dong Li, "It seems that you've made the right decision to take Nie Tian with us. Without his reminders, we might have gone there without proper preparations, and it would be hard to say if we would have returned alive."

“But that makes me want to go even more.” Dong Li seemed to be itching to start the journey as soon as possible. “I can’t wait to see if this relic discovered by Cao Qiushui is connected with those Phantasms in the Realm of Split Void, and why those Phantasms would travel through the starry river and return to the Domain of the Falling Stars.”

Upon hearing her words, Qin Yan’s eyes also lit up. She asked, “Are we still going?”

“Of course! But we need to make proper preparations.” After a moment of pondering, she added, “I’ll ask one of my Worldly realm martial uncles to go with us. You’d better get one of your members who’s at the Worldly realm to join us as well. Also, inform those two from the Pill Pavilion Sect and the Gu Clan of the situation, and urge them to invite Worldly realm experts as well.

“If we have a few Worldly realm experts to go with us, even if we are to encounter Phantasms, we’ll probably be able to get out unharmed.”

Qin Yan nodded. “Okay, I’m on it.”

Chapter 408: Drinking

After Nie Tian had provided Dong Li and Qin Yan with the information he had, both of them assumed a prudent attitude and started making arrangements.

Dong Li instructed Han Mu to prepare a cultivation room for Nie Tian in the Dong Clan, and told Nie Tian to stay there. By sundown the next day, they would head off to the Realm of Dark Underworld together.

After spending a while in the spacious cultivation room, Nie Tian decided to go take a walk in the Dong Clan.

According to Dong Li, the Dong Clan was the most powerful force in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, more powerful than the Cao Clan, Gu Clan, and Pill Pavilion Sect.

The Dong Clan had designated an area for explorers who hunted spirit beasts in the Dong Clan's territory to make transactions with one another.

Since there wasn't much spirit beast meat left from what he had stockpiled in the Realm of Split Void, he hadn't hunted any spirit beasts recently, and he had been eager to find Nie Donghai and Nie Qian, then he figured that he had better gather some more spirit beast meat before leaving for the Realm of Split Void, so that he would be able to provide the green aura in his heart with a continuous source of flesh power.

The number of the spirit beasts in the Realm of a Hundred Battles exceeded the number of spirit beasts in the other eight realms combined. Therefore, other than the large amounts of rare spirit plants, this realm was also very rich in spiritual materials harvested from spirit beasts.

Spirit beasts' blood, skin, horns, and teeth were all necessary materials for forging spiritual tools.

As for spirit beasts' meat, however, since only Qi warriors who had strong desires to temper their fleshy bodies would have a need for it, its price turned out to be very low.

The majority of Qi warriors would focus on accumulating spiritual power and refining psychic power.

In most Qi warriors' eyes, subject to humans' racial characteristics, humans wouldn't be able to enhance the toughness of their fleshy bodies to the same level as the spirit beasts and Demon outsiders could, no matter how hard they tried.

Since human lifespans were limited, people would be considered to be heretics if they spent too much time and energy on tempering their fleshy bodies.

Most powerful sects believed that, with the special defensive shields formed with refined spiritual power, human Qi warriors would be able to make up for their disadvantage in physical strength.

Spiritual power, psychic power, and flesh power were the three major types of power. However, most human Qi warriors would emphasize the first two.

Only outsiders, spirit beasts, and those who were born with outstandingly strong physiques or special bloodlines would give emphasis to their cultivation of flesh power.

Due to the fact that very few humans would go to such lengths to temper their fleshy bodies, and that enormous amounts of spirit beasts in the Realm of a Hundred Battles were killed every day, the price of spirit beast meat was rather low.

Nie Tian took a walk through the Dong Clan's transaction area, and noticed that very few people would stop in front of the stalls that sold spirit beast meat.

He was both surprised and elated.

Soon, he had purchased several thousand kilos of spirit beast

meat, all of which was from third or fourth grade spirit beasts, with only one thousand spirit stones.

After storing all of it in an empty ring of holding, he went to purchase some spirit materials that carried frost power so that he could use them to freeze and preserve his spirit beast meat.

After getting all of this done, he returned to the spacious cultivation room Dong Li had prepared for him.

He made a fire by lighting a pile of cheap, fire-attributed spiritual materials with a wisp of his flame power. Then, he skewered pieces of fourth grade spirit beast meat with his Flame Star, and propped them on the fire.

Before long, the scent of roasted meat pervaded the entire cultivation room.

He took his time ripping chunks off the cooked spirit beast meat with his mouth as he sent a wisp of psychic awareness into his bracelet of holding to examine his belongings.

He had gathered quite a fortune through killing numerous Dark Moon members and Hunters in the Realm of Split Void.

He had traded most of his gains for materials to forge the Flame Star and some spirit stones.

He had stored the rest in the two rings of holding he had prepared for Nie Donghai and Nie Qian.

At this moment, the Flame Dragon Armor and the Flame Star were the only two spiritual tools in his possession.

Aside from them, he had kept some Flame Crystals that he could use to practice the Flame Spirit Incantation, some spiritual materials that contained wood power, and a substantial amount of Star Stones.

He didn't keep any medicinal pills. He had put them all into the rings of holding for Nie Donghai and Nie Qian.

At last, he had found several thousand spirit stones that he could use for daily practice, and several hundred spirit jades for when he was ready to make a breakthrough in his cultivation.

He was well-aware that this trip to the Realm of Dark Underworld wouldn't be smooth at all. Therefore, he did his best to check his spiritual tools and materials, so that he could make up for them if he was lacking something.

As pieces of roasted spirit beast meat disappeared into his mouth, he finished sorting through his belongings.

Considering that he hadn't entered the Greater Heaven stage yet, he figured he had better stick with his bracelet of holding for the time being.

Meanwhile, he stored the ring of holding filled with spirit beast meat in the leather pouch on his waist so that he could fetch meat whenever he wanted.

Now that he had a good understanding of his belongings, his eyes narrowed as he went on to examine himself.

After entering the late Heaven stage, he had spent some time practicing cultivation in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations. Now, the powers in his six vortexes of spiritual power, one vortex of flame power, one vortex of wood power, and one vortex of star power had already gone through two rounds of refinement, but there was still a long way to go before he could reach the bottleneck leading to the Greater Heaven stage.

With a change of his thoughts, wisps of spiritual power of different attributes started to circulate through his meridians.

He focused on sensing the movement of those powers.

Moments later, his digestive system started to process the spirit beast meat he had just consumed, releasing wisps of flesh power.

As soon as the wisps of flesh power were born, they were attracted and savagely devoured by the green aura residing in his

heart, which contained the profound truths of his bloodline.

It seemed that, after awakening the Life Stealth bloodline talent, the mysterious green aura had begun another round of plundering his flesh power.

Nie Tian, who had already become used to its unfathomable appetite, knew that only when it had gathered enough flesh power would it lie dormant again and wait for its next transcendence, and only when it had settled down would his body be able to absorb flesh power and become stronger.

“I wonder when my bloodline will transcend again, and what kind of bloodline talent will be awakened,” he muttered to himself.

Then, he sent a wisp of a mixture of psychic power and soul power into the second fragmentary star mark, which seemed as if it had been branded on his chest, hoping to derive enlightenment from the Starsoul and Starchain magics recorded in it. After scanning the magical symbols floating within the fragmentary star mark for a short while, he was seized by a strong sense of fatigue.

Therefore, he snapped back to reality. He pondered briefly, and realized that he was still too weak to learn them.

Apparently, limited by his current cultivation base, he hadn't been able to transcend his psychic power into soul power yet. Therefore, it was unrealistic for him to master the magics recorded in the second fragmentary star mark now.

It seemed that formidable soul power was needed for him to derive enlightenment from the contents of the second fragmentary star mark.

That meant that he might have to be at the Worldly realm or even higher to be able to refine the second fragmentary star mark.

“Worldly realm...” He shook his head with a bitter expression at the corner of his mouth. “My cultivation base is still too low.”

KREEEN!

At that very moment, the stone door of his cultivation room was slowly pushed open.

Nie Tian immediately snapped out of his thoughts and looked at the door with a frown.

A man stuck his head through the door. After seeing Nie Tian, he laughed heartily and said, “I caught a whiff of the meat’s scent, so I’ve come to fill my belly. You have meat. I have alcohol. I suggest that we mix it up a little bit. What do you say?”

The man was Dong Baijie.

Nie Tian understood that Dong Baijie definitely didn’t come by tracing the scent of the meat.

“Dong Li is your younger sister. Why didn’t you tell me when we met in the Realm of Split Void?” Nie Tian asked, his eyebrows furrowed.

Dong Baijie let himself in, shut the stone door, and sat in front of Nie Tian. He casually handed a bottle of alcohol to Nie Tian before taking a piece of cooked meat off the Flame Star. Under Nie Tian’s gaze, he ripped off a big chunk of meat and washed it down with a gulp of alcohol. Only then did he look at Nie Tian and say, “You didn’t suffer any losses from her in the Realm of Split Void, did you? On the contrary, she was the one who was repeatedly defeated.

“I take you as my friend, so it was between my friend and my sister. What could I possibly do?

“I could only pretend I didn’t know anything of it.”

“Friend? Really?” Nie Tian asked, curling his lips.

He took a gulp of Dong Baijie’s alcohol, feeling a burning sensation in his throat as he swallowed it. After it went down, he felt like it was burning in his stomach. Then, his mouth was filled with a lingering alcoholic scent as he started to feel lighter.

“Of course.” The look in Dong Baijie’s eyes was sincere. “I’m a person who is only interested in those who can beat me or make me suffer losses. I would never respect those who died at my hands or fled from our battles during the Heaven Gate trial. You, on the other hand, were only at the Lesser Heaven stage back then, yet you dared to enter my section, and eventually managed to take that fragmentary star mark from me. That I respect.”

“That was mere luck... your sister’s words,” Nie Tian said.

Dong Baijie smiled. “Perhaps. However, luck should be considered a part of strength. I don’t look at the process. I only look at the results.”

Nie Tian took another gulp of alcohol, feeling that the alcohol Dong Baijie had brought with him was strong and tasty enough. After taking merely two mouthfuls, not only did he become more talkative, but he also felt increasingly light and relaxed.

At that point, he finally understood why Li MUYANG and Li YE were so fond of drinking.

Under the influence of the alcohol, he opened his robe and showed Dong Baijie the second fragmentary star mark on his chest. “This fragmentary star mark belonged to you, and I took it from you. I don’t believe that you don’t hate me for that at all.”

Chapter 409: A Shocking Presumption

GLUG! GLUG!

After gulping down a few mouthfuls of alcohol, Dong Baijie laughed loudly and heartily, his face reddened. “Truth be told, I was quite angry at the beginning, and couldn’t let it go for some time. However, I got over it after I heard some news and learned that even if I got to keep that fragmentary star mark, it wouldn’t have worked out for me.”

“What news?” Nie Tian asked.

“I heard that Ning Yang wasn’t able to derive enlightenment from the third fragmentary star mark in his possession. That was when I realized that even though the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace had divided its legacies into three marks, the first mark was the key.” Dong Baijie shook his head and smiled bitterly.

He paused to take a deep look at Nie Tian with a meaningful expression on his face before adding, “Or I can say: you were the key.

“Even though I don’t understand why the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace would make such arrangements, I know that Ning Yang and I both served as props.

“Whether I was able to keep that fragmentary star mark or not, I wouldn’t have become the successor acknowledged by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace. Not me, not Ning Yang, only you.”

Confusion spread across Nie Tian’s face.

“Do you know that this wasn’t the first time that Heaven Gates have appeared in the Domain of the Falling Stars?” Dong Baijie continued. “There have been two recorded appearances before this time. In both those instances, the situation was very similar to what’s going on now. People obtained those fragmentary star marks in the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace.”

Dong Baijie's eyes shone with a serious light. "But do you know what happened to them afterwards?"

Nie Tian shook his head.

"They died, all of them." A extremely grim expression appeared on Dong Baijie's face. "That means everyone who has ever obtained those fragmentary star marks has died, without exception. Also, none of them were able to refine their fragmentary star mark.

"When they died, the fragmentary star marks on them gradually faded, and eventually disappeared.

"That makes you the first person who has ever refined a fragmentary star mark of all three times the Heaven Gates have appeared.

"The reason I stopped resenting you was that I thought it through. Even if I kept the second fragmentary star mark to myself, I might have already died like Ning Yang."

Nie Tian couldn't mask his astonishment.

Dong Baijie's tone grew heavy. "However, no spatial rifts ever appeared around the times that Heaven Gates have previously appeared. Only this time, soon after the Heaven Gates appeared, three spatial rifts ripped open.

"After gathering all three fragmentary star marks and refining the first mark, you eventually sealed the three spatial rifts and saved the Domain of the Falling Stars, therefore fulfilling the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace's promise to guard the Domain of the Falling Stars.

"From what I can tell, this is by no means fortuitous!"

Dong Baijie's words were powerful and resonating. His eyes shone with the light of certainty, as if he was the only one who had seen through the truth.

“W-what do you mean, not fortuitous?” Nie Tian asked, confused.

Dong Baijie laughed heartily as he cast aside the bottle he had emptied and took out another bottle of alcohol.

This time, he didn’t drink as fast as he had drunk the first bottle. Rather, he took sips.

With a complicated expression, he explained, “After I learned that Ning Yang wasn’t able to refine the fragmentary star mark he had, I went to the Realm of Flame Heaven and visited the Nie Clan, where I thoroughly investigated your background.

“You were born in the Nie Clan; your mother was a member of the Nie Clan, and her name was Nie Jin.

“Forgive me for being blunt, there’s nothing special about the Nie Clan or your mother.

“But I can’t seem to find any information on your father, not even signs of his existence. No one knows who he is. I even searched in other realms of the Domain of the Falling Stars, and failed to discover information about him.

“It was as if the man showed up out of nowhere, and then disappeared into thin air.

“You investigated my background?” Nie Tian snorted with a cold smile.

“Sorry, I couldn’t help it. I needed an answer.” An apologetic expression appeared on Dong Baijie’s face. “I tend to get to the bottom of matters. From what I can tell, it can’t be a coincidence that you managed to receive and refine the fragmentary star marks and become the successor of the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace’s legacies. There must be something about you I don’t know yet, and that could be the reason why you’re able to refine the fragmentary star marks.

“I even have a feeling that the appearance of the Heaven Gates

and the spatial rifts, and all the anomalies that came along afterwards, happened because of you.

“You must have something, or there must be something about you, that made the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace choose you to be their one and only successor in the Domain of the Falling Stars in so many years.

“I feel that your father, who you never even met, is the reason behind all this.

“It’s him who gave you this substantial fortune.

“Yet, you know nothing about that.”

A strong shudder ran through Nie Tian’s body.

His unusual bloodline and the green aura that coiled in his heart proved his uniqueness.

Of course, these were not something the Nie Clan or his mother could give him.

However, he hadn’t expected that Dong Baijie would be able to derive so many things simply from the special features and clues he had picked up from him and everything around him, and then eventually come to such a bold yet well-founded conclusion.

“Even though the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace has long since left the Domain of the Falling Stars, I believe that ancient Qi warrior sect is still thriving somewhere in the boundless starry river.” Dong Baijie sipped his alcohol as he spoke. “Considering they’ve made you their successor, you must be unique, and they must have placed certain expectations on you.

“After realizing this, I knew that I could only become friends with you, not enemies.

“I can’t afford to mess with you, nor can the Dong Clan.”

With these words, Dong Baijie smiled and shook his head. “How many people in this world can see through this? Senior Li Muiyang

might. The sectmaster of the Heaven Palace Sect might too. But since the Heaven Palace Sect is currently the overlord of the Domain of the Falling Stars, even if he has come to realize it, he might dare to go against the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace's will.

“After all, if the successor of the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace rises up in the Domain of the Falling Stars, the Heaven Palace Sect will have no choice but to humble itself.

“That's not something the Heaven Palace Sect would want.”

Moments later, Dong Baijie finished another bottle and continued, “Oh right, I bet you didn't know that even if you didn't succumb to my sister, since the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect asked us to do them a favor, your grandfather and aunt would have been able to return to the Realm of Flame Heaven unscathed. My sister and Qin Yan didn't tell you this so that they could force you to agree to go to the Realm of Dark Underworld with them.”

Nie Tian was surprised. “What? She fooled me?”

Dong Baijie smiled bitterly. “I apologize on her behalf. My sister is good at playing tricks, but I can't say that she's wise. The other reason I'm here is to let you know that if you don't want to go to the Realm of Dark Underworld with them, you can leave now. Wherever you want to go, I'll make arrangements for you. As I said, I only want to be your friend, not enemy.”

Nie Tian went blank. Eyebrows furrowed, he pondered for a while, then he realized that he didn't have any other urgent business at the moment.

Furthermore, he was actually quite interested in this Phantasms' relic in the Realm of Dark Underworld.

“However, there might be something interesting in the Phantasms' relic,” Dong Baijie added. “If you don't have other things to do, you might as well go with them and see if you can

find something useful.”

“I’m going,” Nie Tian said.

With a hearty smile, Dong Baijie nodded and rose to his feet. “Well, I’ve emptied my heart to you today. I hope that you will give me face and forgive my little sister for what she’s done. And... If you will, please keep an eye on her while you’re in the Realm of Dark Underworld.”

“Aren’t you worried that she’ll try to kill me?” Nie Tian snorted a cold smile.

“Nope, I have faith in your strength and wisdom.” Dong Baijie said with a smile. “Also, I talked to those Worldly realm uncles of my clan who are going to the Realm of Dark Underworld with you. Don’t worry. If she ever crosses the line, they will come forward and stop her. I won’t let any member of the Dong Clan treat you as an enemy.”

“...I hope so,” Nie Tian said.

“I’ve got some business to tend to, so I won’t go to the Realm of Dark Underworld with you. Good luck. We’ll get together and drink our fill next time we meet.” Dong Baijie laughed broadly and placed a dozen bottles of alcohol on the floor. “I can tell that this stuff is to your taste, so these are for you. Please give me face and don’t mind my little sister.

“One last thing, I didn’t tell anyone about this meeting between us, and I’d appreciate it if you didn’t mention it to my sister.”

With these words, Dong Baijie waved and wobbled out of Nie Tian’s room.

After he was gone, Nie Tian stayed up all night, pondering Dong Baijie’s words.

Chapter 410: The Realm of Dark Underworld

After Dong Baijie left, Nie Tian stayed up all night.

He gulped down more of the hard alcohol Dong Baijie had left for him. However, the more he drank, the more clear-headed he felt, and all he could think of was what Dong Baijie had said to him.

He had never expected that Dong Baijie would go to such lengths to find the truth. He had even visited Black Cloud City in the Realm of Flame Heaven just to run a thorough investigation on his background.

According to Dong Baijie's speculation, his father, who he had never met, was probably the reason why he was so special.

The fact that he possessed bloodline power, had been able to refine a fragmentary star mark, and the other incredible things about him all had something to do with his father.

It had been thousands of years since all connections between the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace and the Domain of the Falling Stars had been cut off. Not a single member of the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace had come to the Domain of the Falling Stars during this period of time.

Even though Heaven Gates had appeared twice, no one had been able to refine the legacies they had obtained from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace.

He was the only one.

Then, where was his father from? And who was he?

Did he have some kind of connection with the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace?

Questions exploded in his head, making him anxious and unable to go back to his cultivation.

He sat out the whole night, but still failed to clear his thoughts. Rather, he ended up even more frustrated and perplexed.

Eventually, he came to the conclusion that only when his cultivation base rose to a certain stage, and he could travel outside of the Domain of the Falling Stars, would he be able to find the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace and solve the mysteries in his heart.

“Dong Baijie...” This unbridled and outstanding man from the Dong Clan was one of the few people who he believed possessed true wisdom.

He was able to gather and sort through the most insignificant details and information, and derive many critical conclusions from them.

Dong Baijie was only about ten years older than him, yet he was so mature and wise, which was very admirable.

Before, he had thought that the cunning and cruel Dong Li was the most hard-to-deal-with person in the Dong Clan.

But after having an extended conversation with him, Nie Tian now realized that Dong Li had nothing but tricks, while Dong Baijie was the truly wise one.

Caught up in his thoughts, Nie Tian lost track of time. Only when Han Mu came did he realize that it was already time to leave.

He followed Han Mu to the Dong Clan’s hidden, inter-realm teleportation portal, where Dong Li, her clan uncle Dong Mingxuan, and six other Greater Heaven stage Dong Clan members were already waiting.

The middle Worldly realm Dong Mingxuan took a deep look at Nie Tian, and nodded so briefly that it was almost imperceptible.

As Nie Tian came closer, he realized that he had met some of the Greater Heaven stage members standing beside Dong Li in the Realm of Split Void.

It was just that. because he had assumed a different appearance, they didn't recognize him.

"His name is Wu Tian, a subordinate of mine." Dong Li introduced him to everyone else. Those people muddled through greeting him. Indifference and slight disdain could be seen in their eyes.

Aside from Dong Mingxuan, all the other Dong Clan members were at the Greater Heaven stage.

Nie Tian was the only one at the late Heaven stage. They saw through that the moment he arrived.

Therefore, it was natural that these Greater Heaven stage Qi warriors, who had joined the exploration team to play up to Dong Li, made light of Nie Tian for his insignificant cultivation base.

Especially when they had been waiting for him for quite a while.

"Let's go." Dong Li didn't say more than what was necessary. The moment she saw Nie Tian and Han Mu, she ordered everyone to step into the teleportation portal.

After everyone was in, intense spatial energy fluctuations filled the portal. In the blink of an eye, Nie Tian and the Dong Clan members vanished.

In the next moment, Nie Tian found himself standing under a gray, misty sky along with Dong Li and the others.

Everyone clamored as soon as they saw Dong Li. They either blamed her in playful ways, or were secretly discontent with her unpunctuality.

"Dong Li is here!"

"You drag your heels every time we go on a trip. You're the last one to get here again this time."

"Everyone has been waiting for you."

"Greetings, Uncle Dong."

Nie Tian looked around with rapt attention, and discovered that they were in a lush forest.

Under his feet was an inter-realm teleportation portal. While he was glancing around, Han Mu dragged him out of the portal before it sank into the ground and disappeared.

A huge stone plate appeared where the teleportation portal had been.

The stone was covered in grass and dirt, blending in perfectly with the environment and leaving no sign that a teleportation portal had ever existed there.

Amazed, Nie Tian unleashed his psychic awareness to examine that area, but failed to find any trace of the teleportation portal underground.

That was when he realized that this hidden, inter-realm teleportation portal must have been jointly established by the major forces of the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

Only core members of the Dong Clan, the Cao Clan, the Gu Clan, the Pill Pavilion Sect, and the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce would be able to use it.

Even the Flame God Sect and the Spirit God Sect, which were the two most powerful Qi warrior sects in this realm, probably didn't know about it.

After snapping out of his amazement, Nie Tian's gaze swept across those who had been waiting by the teleportation portal while Dong Li exchanged greetings with them.

He saw Qin Yan from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, who was now surrounded by a handful of Qi warriors from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce.

Most of them seemed to be at the Greater Heaven stage, just like the Dong Clan members Dong Li had brought.

The only exception was an old woman, who seemed to be at the middle Worldly realm, the same as Dong Mingxuan.

A broad smile appeared on Dong Mingxuan's dried-up face as he walked over to the old woman's side. The two of them chatted casually, as if they were old friends.

As for the group from the Gu Clan, their leader was Gu Haofeng, an early Greater Heaven stage Qi warrior, and they also had an early Worldly realm guest elder in their group.

The leader of the group from the Pill Pavilion Sect was the middle Greater Heaven stage Qian Xin, who was the son of the Pill Pavilion Sect's sectmaster. Dressed in a luxurious alchemist's robe, he behaved gracefully and with good manners.

Even though their group was the smallest, the Qi warriors around him were the strongest.

To his left and right stood two Worldly realm experts, one at the middle Worldly realm, the other one at the early Worldly realm.

However, the initiator of this operation, Cao Qiushui, wasn't there. It seemed that he and his team had set out before Dong Li's arrival.

With a poised expression, Nie Tian watched Dong Li discuss the possibility of them encountering Phantasms with the people from the five major forces in the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

Holding up a fine and detailed map, Qin Yan called out to everyone, "Cai Qiushui showed me where they would be. I'll lead the way, and we'll meet him and his team first. Everyone stay together, lest we attract attention from the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect."

The leaders nodded as they reminded their subordinates and clansmen in low voices that they shouldn't act on their own.

After Qin Yan got ahold of her bearings, she and her men from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce led the way in front as the

five groups of people marched through the dense forest at a fast pace.

Nie Tian, who traveled with the other Dong Clan members, didn't summon his Heaven Eyes to scan his surroundings.

After all, they had powerful Worldly realm experts like Dong Mingxuan on their team. Their psychic power had already transcended into soul power, and their perception of living beings and soul fluctuations in the vicinity wouldn't be any less keen than his Heaven Eyes'. Therefore, he didn't need to worry about that.

Furthermore, as soon as he unleashed his Heaven Eyes, those Worldly realm experts would notice them, and thus be suspicious about his identity.

Over the next few days, Nie Tian marched on with the others and didn't speak much.

He spent most of his resting time alone, practicing cultivation, and providing the green aura in his heart with flesh power by consuming spirit beast meat he had purchased in the Dong Clan.

Meanwhile, he observed and paid attention to the conversations between Dong Li and the other leaders, and soon found out their personalities, strengths, and relationships with one another.

Eight days later, they found the members from the Cao Clan under Qin Yan's leadership.

However, they discovered that bodies of dead Qi warriors were scattered around those members from the Cao Clan, as if they had just gone through a fierce battle.

From the way those corpses were dressed, they could tell that they were disciples of the Flame God Sect.

"You're finally here," Cao Qiushui said with a smile.

Oddly, as a man, Cao Qiushui was slenderly built, and had the gentle qualities of a woman. "I'm so relieved that you guys are

here. People from the Flame God Sect discovered us. Fortunately, it's no longer a problem now."

Chapter 411: Like A Shadow

“No one got away, did they?” Qin Yan asked with a frown. “After all, this is the Realm of Dark Underworld, and we’re on the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect’s turf. If they discover us so early, we’ll probably get into trouble.”

Worry could be seen on the faces of the people from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

The Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect were among the most famous and powerful Qi warrior sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars. However, since they were from the five most influential forces in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, they didn’t fear them.

It was just that they hadn’t brought many men with them, and their primary goal was to explore the Phantasms’ relic Cao Qiushui had discovered and find out about the secrets that were hidden there, not to start an inter-realm war with the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect.

Therefore, their plan was to avoid alarming the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect, quietly finish their exploration, and then evacuate without creating a stir.

With a smile, Cao Qiushui pointed at the corpses on the ground and said with a reassuring tone, “It’s no longer a problem; everyone that saw us is here. Even though the Realm of Dark Underworld is quite vast, and many parts of it are rarely visited by humans, it’s inevitable that we will run into patrolling members of the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect.

“As long as we march carefully and avoid contact with their Worldly realm or Profound realm experts, we’ll probably be fine.”

Qin Yan nodded. “I hope so.”

As a special organization from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce had business relationships

with almost every major Qi warrior sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars, including the Flame God Sect and Spirit God Sect.

They didn't want to jeopardize their business relationships with them by getting caught exploring and plundering valuable legacies from their territory.

However, they wouldn't mind secretly taking out one or two of their patrol teams if doing that could let them avoid future trouble.

Cao Qiushui's eyes swept across the large crowd. Seeing that the Dong Clan, the Gu Clan, the Pill Pavilion Sect, and the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce had all brought Worldly realm experts, he felt rather confident. "Let's move out, everyone! The Phantasms' relic is in a secluded region. I don't think others have discovered it yet.

"From what I could tell, I was probably the only one who had.

"It's just that, for some reason, phantasm Qi has appeared in that region recently. The appearance of phantasm Qi could attract some unwanted attention and expose that relic.

"Plus, some Specters appeared out of nowhere and started roaming about in that region.

"Those Specters were quite powerful, I wasn't confident that I would be able to defeat them with just me and my people. That was why I asked you guys to come."

Dong Mingxuan was taken aback. "Specters?!"

Nie Tian, who hadn't spoken much along the way, was also deeply surprised.

The Ghost Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven was a sect that excelled at refining and manipulating Specters. He had spent some time in the Ghost Sect, and Li Jing had told him a bit about Specters.

The so-called Specters were none other than souls that lingered

in heaven and earth. They could either be discarnate souls of dead humans, spirit beasts, or other living species.

Once soul-possessing beings died, if they possessed limited strength and didn't practice soul magics, their souls would soon dissipate from this world.

Only those who were skilled in soul magics would be able to remain in soul form after their fleshly bodies perished.

However, these kinds of souls couldn't be categorized as Specters.

Specters referred to the discarnate souls of deceased living beings that didn't dissipate due to a special environment or some other profound reason.

Most Specters didn't possess their own will or intellect, and they didn't have any memories of their past lives.

Normally, they would just roam about and hunt down living beings, following their nature.

For those who practiced certain types of soul incantations like the disciples of the Ghost Sect, Specters were something they could manipulate and make use of.

Disciples of the Ghost Sect practiced many soul-related magics and incantations that would allow them to refine Specters and use them to strengthen themselves, or they could seal Specters in special containers and put them to use at critical times.

The Ghost Sect was only one of the sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars that refined and used Specters.

“Yeah, Specters... powerful Specters,” Cao Qiushui said with a somewhat grim expression. “As you know, the Phantasms are a strong outsider species that is very good at using soul magics and controlling Specters. Since this realm used to be inhabited by Phantasms, and we're going to a relic left by Phantasms, it's normal that Specters will start to appear in that region.”

“You’re right,” Dong Mingxuan said, his eyebrows knitted. “Phantasms are indeed good at refining and controlling Specters. They carry a unique bloodline and possess special talent that allows them to do so. I’ve heard that Phantasms appeared in the Realm of Split Void not long ago.

“The sudden appearance of those Phantasms in the Realm of Split Void, the appearance of phantasm Qi in the relic here, and Specters that appeared out of nowhere...

“I have a feeling that there’s a connection between these two incidents, and also, that we might run into Phantasms while we explore this Phantasms’ relic.”

“Don’t worry, Uncle Dong,” Gu Haofeng from the Gu Clan said arrogantly. “The Domain of the Falling Stars has been dominated by humans for thousands of years now. What kind of impact can a handful of Phantasms create? Furthermore, considering our collective strength, even if we come across a few Phantasms, they’ll end up being the losing side!”

In light of his unconstrained manner, it was obvious that he hadn’t suffered any great defeats before, and that he had great confidence in these Qi warriors from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

However, Qian Xin from the Pill Pavilion Sect seemed very prudent and cautious. He didn’t say a single word upon learning about the appearance of Specters.

Standing among the Dong Clan members, Nie Tian listened as the others discussed the possible connection between the appearance of Specters and Phantasms.

Most likely, none of these junior clan members and sect members from the Realm of a Hundred Battles had ever seen a Phantasm with their own eyes. They might have only read about them in their clans’ or sects’ ancient records.

None of them possessed a first-hand and full understanding of Phantasms.

Nie Tian, however, had personally seen a Phantasm in the forbidden region in the Realm of Split Void.

That Phantasm had hidden inside a meteor that had plummeted from the distant starry sky. As soon as it had appeared, it had badly injured Ning Yang. The mere thought of its terrifying battle prowess and strength made Nie Tian's blood run cold.

If he were by himself, even if the Flame God Sect wasn't a threat to him, he would never have had the audacity to come to the Realm of Dark Underworld and explore that Phantasms' relic alone.

"We'd better get to the bottom of this before other people find out about that relic. If we discover any rare items or unique treasures, we need to get them, then leave the Realm of Dark Underworld as quickly as possible." With these words, Cao Qiushui marched out and led the way for the exploration team.

Nie Tian followed along silently with the others from the Dong Clan.

Thanks to the keen perception of those Worldly realm experts' soul power, they managed to steer clear of anyone from the Flame God Sect or the Spirit God Sect on their journey.

Everything went smoothly. They didn't expose themselves or get into any unnecessary trouble.

The Realm of Dark Underworld was dark and gloomy year-round. The sun, the moon, and the stars could only be briefly seen on rare occasions.

As the team traveled through the dense forest at a fast speed, Nie Tian didn't initiate a conversation with the others a single time.

Among the people Dong Li had brought, Han Mu was the only one who was aware of his true identity, and would talk to him once

in a while. None of the others said a single word to him. Instead, they just talked among themselves.

The same went for the people from the other forces, who only knew Han Mu and the others from the Dong Clan. No one paid any attention to Nie Tian, a Heaven stage nobody.

One starless and moonless night, the sky was as dark as ink.

After days of uninterrupted marching through the forest, the exploration team from the Realm of a Hundred Battles felt rather exhausted. Therefore, they stopped, and each of them found their own place to rest and recover.

Although the Worldly realm experts were from different clans and sects, they knew each other well, so they sat together to discuss matters regarding practicing cultivation.

It was obvious that they harbored the intent to temper their juniors, since they hadn't given any suggestions regarding anything about this exploration trip. Rather, they let Dong Li and the other young leaders make all the decisions.

Dong Li, Qin Yan, Gu Haofeng, Qian Xin, and Cao Qiushui gathered in a circle. After a brief discussion with them, Dong Li stepped directly towards Nie Tian.

Upon seeing her approach, Han Mu, who had stayed by Nie Tian's side since the start, took the initiative to rise to his feet and walk away, leaving this area to Dong Li and Nie Tian.

In a distant location, Dong Mingxuan, who was just about to say something to the other Worldly realm experts, noticed Dong Li's action. He held his tongue and watched Dong Li step closer to Nie Tian, as if he bore Dong Baijie's order at heart and feared that she would make a move against Nie Tian.

By the time he saw Dong Li sit down in front of Nie Tian, he realized that she wasn't going to seek trouble with him. Therefore, he turned his head back and rejoined the conversation among his

peers.

In another location, Gu Haofeng's brows rose as he noticed Dong Li's action. With a strange expression, she watched Dong Li sit down before Nie Tian.

"Wu Tian, do you think we'll encounter Phantasms on this trip?" Dong Li asked in a very low voice after sitting down, as if she were afraid that others would overhear their conversation.

"I'm afraid so," Nie Tian replied.

"Phantasms are really that formidable?" Dong Li asked.

Nie Tian nodded. "Really."

"Did you meet with my brother?" The light in Dong Li's eyes blazed like a torch.

"No, I didn't," Nie Tian said with great determination.

"Is that the truth?"

"Yeah!"

Chapter 412: Breaking up in Discord

“My brother sees great potential in you,” Dong Li said with a puzzled expression on her face, her slender eyebrows slightly furrowed. “I don’t understand why he’s not angry at you, considering you took away the fragmentary star mark that belonged to him, but instead, he speaks very highly of you.”

Nie Tian didn’t want to talk, so he remained silent.

“I’ve already finished my part of our agreement by sending your family and friends back to the Cloudsoaring Sect,” Dong Li said. “I hope you can honor your part of our agreement by assisting me without holding back.”

The thought of the fact that this woman had tricked him into agreeing to her terms with Qin Yan’s help, while she had actually sent Nie Donghai and the others back under the pressure from the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect, made Nie Tian furious.

Therefore, he didn’t show any interest in responding to Dong Li.

After realizing that he was sulking, Dong Li snorted coldly and said, “What right do you have to be mad at me? Back when we were in the Realm of Split Void, you repeatedly sabotaged my operation, which I spent a long time planning. You made me lose face in the clan. I already showed you great mercy by not killing you in my clan’s territory. What can you possibly be sulking about?”

“Do you really think you’re in the right?” Nie Tian asked with a low voice. “Did you or did you not first make a move against me in that forest? If I hadn’t been vigilant, I would have already died at your hands like Shen Wei and the others! Only you’re allowed to trick others, and other people can’t pay you back?”

Dong Li sprung to her feet and left in a huff, no longer desiring to talk to Nie Tian.

Nie Tian let out a snort, inwardly cursing the woman's unwillingness to listen to reason.

“Li!” Gu Haofeng raised his hand and called out to Dong Li with a taunting tone. “This is interesting. Your subordinate actually dares to question you and argue with you. This must not be the Dong Li I know.”

Since they were far away from the others, and Dong Li and Nie Tian had been talking in low voices, even the Worldly realm experts probably wouldn't have been able to overhear the conversation between them.

Gu Haofeng only saw Dong Li step over to Nie Tian, where they had a few words, and then Dong Li left, fuming with anger.

However, this was enough evidence to know that their conversation hadn't been pleasant.

That was when Gu Haofeng became suspicious. Normally, as Dong Li's subordinate, Nie Tian should listen to her no matter what, but instead, he argued with Dong Li. What gave him the courage to do that?

Annoyed, Dong Li shot him a nasty look. “It's none of your business!”

Feeling like he had run into a stone wall, Gu Haofeng's face dropped. He was used to being abused by Dong Li. Instead of getting angry, he laid his cold gaze on Nie Tian and said, “Li, if you don't want to discipline your subordinate, I can help you.”

“Leave me alone!” Dong Li blurted.

Gu Haofeng touched his nose. Even though he was quite angry, he didn't say anything else.

After Dong Li left, Nie Tian, who was still sitting in a distant corner, took out a spirit stone and started recovering with his eyes narrowed.

Clearly, he wasn't in the mood to respond to Gu Haofeng.

After marching with and observing everyone for a few days, Nie Tian had long since discovered that Gu Haofeng had affections toward Dong Li. Whenever there was a chance, he would rush to her side and show great concern.

However, it was very obvious that Dong Li didn't like him. Her face was always filled with impatience and contempt when she saw him.

Gu Haofeng seemed to be blind to her indifferent attitude. He stuck to his own way, as if he believed that, with enough sincerity, he would be able to split open metal and stone.

"Another idiot who's looking to die," Nie Tian said inwardly.

In his eyes, those who were ignorant enough to approach Dong Li, this vicious beauty, were all seeking their own doom.

Han Mu suddenly appeared and once again sat down next to him. "Our Miss actually thinks quite highly of you. Otherwise, she wouldn't have invited you to come to the Realm of Dark Underworld and explore this Phantasms' relic together."

Nie Tian's eyes snapped open, an unpleasant expression appearing on his face. "Invite? She made me, okay?!"

With a smile, Han Mu said, "That depends on how you want to look at it. Both Dong Baijie and Dong Li have the same attitude: they only make friends with those who have defeated them or made them suffer losses. However, you are the only one who has ever defeated both of them."

"I should be honored then?" A sarcastic smile spread across Nie Tian's face.

Han Mu's expression turned serious as he said sincerely, "The fact is that there isn't any unforgivable feud between you and her. If you want to, you can take this exploration trip as an opportunity to resolve the personal feud that started in the Realm of Split Void.

Plus, I heard that our young lord is also quite fond of you.”

“She summoned every force she could find in the Realm of Split Void to round me up and kill me. I’m afraid that’s not so easily forgiven.” Nie Tian said sarcastically.

“You’re alive and well, aren’t you?” Han Mu asked with a smile.

“There were many occasions where I was almost killed,” Nie Tian responded coldly.

“But not only did you manage to survive, but you even thrived after such tempering.” Han Mu lowered his voice and continued, “Actually, our Miss isn’t mad at you for killing her Fang members. She only feels frustrated and angry because you defeated her over and over again. The way I see it, it’s not going to last.”

“All I want is for this exploration trip in the Realm of Dark Underworld to be finished soon so that I can get as far away from her as possible.” Nie Tian make his stance clear again.

Seeing that he was rather determined and didn’t show the slightest intention to resolve the issue between them, Han Mu let out a soft sigh and gave up.

He was well-aware that Nie Tian had been highly regarded by Qi warriors in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations after helping them relieve their crisis.

Meanwhile, Nie Tian possessed the legacy marks from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace. As long as he didn’t die prematurely, the sky would be his limit.

Therefore, he was slightly worried that Dong Li would act rashly and get Nie Tian killed somehow, which would definitely draw the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect’s wrath, putting her and the Dong Clan in huge trouble.

In the dark forest, the people from the Realm of a Hundred Battles gradually stopped talking with one another.

They either practiced cultivation with spirit stones, or tried to derive enlightenment from the incantations they practiced. Every single one of them was submerged in their own world.

The same went for Nie Tian.

Firstly, he consumed a substantial amount of spirit beast meat. Then, he conducted rounds of tempering of his spiritual sea, making preparations for his advancement into the Greater Heaven stage.

Late in the night, after finishing another round of the expansion of his spiritual sea, he opened his eyes and glanced around.

He discovered that the two Worldly realm Qi warriors from the Pill Pavilion Sect were nowhere to be seen. Even though he was curious about where they had gone, he didn't attach much importance to it, but instead closed his eyes and resumed cultivation.

Moments later, he was suddenly awoken by the sounds of garments fluttering. His eyes snapped open, and he saw that one of the Worldly realm experts from the Pill Pavilion Sect was back.

It was Qiu Liang, an early Worldly realm expert. The moment he returned, he said to the crowd in a low voice, "We've found some members of the Spirit God Sect in the vicinity. All of them died rather strangely."

One after another, people were awoken from their cultivation. With furrowed eyebrows, they gazed at him.

Cao Qiushui rose to his feet and said to the crowd, looking at Dong Li, "We'll go over there and take a look, but we don't need everyone to come."

"Han Mu, Wu Tian, you come with us." Dong Li waved at them.

Qin Yan, Gu Haofeng, and Qian Xin also gathered a couple of subordinates before they left together under Qiu Liang's leadership.

Dong Mingxuan and the Worldly realm experts from the Gu Clan and the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce only opened their eyes and glanced around after hearing Qiu Liang's words, but they didn't move a bit.

It seemed that they felt rather secure having Cao Qiushui, Dong Li, and the other juniors make the decisions.

Seeing Nie Tian and Han Mu rise to their feet and leave with Dong Li, the other members of the Dong Clan started whispering to each other, deeply puzzled.

“Wu Tian?! Miss Dong is actually taking Wu Tian?”

“I understand why she's taking big brother Han Mu, but why the hell would she take Wu Tian?”

“This is odd.”

Gu Haofeng's face was also filled with confusion as he constantly looked over his shoulder to check on Dong Li and Nie Tian, not understanding why she would take the man who had dared to have a heated argument with her.

It wasn't very long before Qiu Liang led the small team to a secluded corner of the forest.

The corpses of seven Qi warriors dressed in the Spirit God Sect's garments were scattered on the ground, all of whom had bulging eyes and blood at the corners of their eyes.

After a brief scan, they failed to locate lethal wounds on any of them.

Then, they discovered that Shen Zhong, the middle Worldly realm expert from the Pill Pavilion Sect, was standing with his back against a large tree, his face expressionless.

He adopted the same attitude even when Qian Xin, the son of the Pill Pavilion Sect's sectmaster, came over to him.

However, Qian Xin didn't seem to mind at all. On the contrary,

he bowed to him before going off to examine the corpses with Dong Li and the others.

Nie Tian followed Dong Li and Han Mu to the side of one of the corpses, where they crouched down to conduct a thorough examination.

“This man didn’t suffer any physical wounds, but his soul was shattered.” Han Mu made the judgment after a brief scan. “His soul was probably instantly shattered by some sort of powerful psychic magic. The strange thing is that disciples of the Spirit God Sect should prioritize their cultivation of psychic power. How come they even failed to withstand a single blow?”

“What do you think?” Dong Li asked Nie Tian.

Nie Tian didn’t say a word. Instead, he secretly took a glance at the two Worldly realm experts from the Pill Pavilion Sect, and said, “I don’t think his soul took a strong blow from a fierce psychic attack. Instead, it looks like someone took his soul.”

Upon overhearing his words, Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect suddenly shot an astonished gaze at him.

Chapter 413: The Sign of A Phantasm

The finger Nie Tian used to point in between the corpse's eyebrows was infused with his psychic power, as well as a wisp of soul power from the seven fragmentary stars in his soul.

As his soul power infiltrated deeper and deeper, he discovered that there wasn't any damage in the dead man's head.

Normally speaking, if the man had died from a powerful psychic attack to his soul, his brain would have been damaged and become less intact.

However, from what Nie Tian could tell, the man's brain was perfectly fine, yet his soul was long gone.

Therefore, his conclusion was that the man hadn't died from a powerful psychic attack like Han Mu had said.

After Nie Tian stepped to one side, giving her space, Dong Li crouched down and simulated Nie Tian's actions by narrowing her eyes and pointing her jade-like, slender finger in the middle of the man's eyebrows.

However, since she didn't have any fragmentary stars in her soul and she hadn't entered the Worldly realm, she could only wield her psychic power, not the more profound soul power. Therefore, she couldn't perceive the inside of the man's head as Nie Tian could.

The same went for Han Mu.

A moment later, she withdrew her hand, rose to her feet, and turned to gaze at Nie Tian and Han Mu.

With a smile, Han Mu said, "Perhaps Wu Tian is right."

Dong Li snorted coldly. "Why would you trust his judgment instead of your own?"

With a justified expression on his face, Han Mu said, "Well, since

he was able to escape from our pursuit and blockades repeatedly in the Realm of Split Void, he must have his unique way of perceiving matters.”

Meanwhile, off to the side...

After examining another corpse, Qian Xin from the Pill Pavilion Sect asked the early Worldly realm expert beside him, “What’s your take on this, Uncle Qiu?”

Qiu Liang didn’t answer, but instead turned to look at Shen Zhong.

“Even though we’ve joined your exploration operation in the Realm of Dark Underworld, you are the decision-makers,” Shen Zhong said at a slow pace. “Our sectmaster told us to let you solve any problems on your own and learn from them, as long as it’s not life-threatening. We do know how these men died, but we won’t just tell you. You’ll have to find the answer yourself.”

Qian Xin nodded. “I see.”

Moments later, the few talented youngsters from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, who had spread out to check the corpses, regathered to exchange their thoughts.

Cao Qiushui and Qian Xin’s conclusions coincided with Han Mu’s. Both of them assumed that those men had been killed by sudden and powerful psychic attacks. Furthermore, those who did it must possess very profound cultivation bases, and considered the belongings of these members of the Spirit God Sect not worth looting.

After all, the victims’ rings of holding and spiritual tools were all there. Not a single one was missing.

Only experts with extremely high cultivation bases would turn a blind eye to those valuable resources.

Dong Li, however, presented the theory that those men had died because someone had taken their souls, which was Nie Tian’s

original conclusion.

She finally chose to trust Nie Tian.

An astonished expression filled Qin Yan's face as she asked, "How do you know that, Li?"

Dong Li didn't answer, but rather shot a sideways glance at Nie Tian from afar.

Qin Yin immediately picked up her signal. A brilliant light flashed across her beautiful eyes before she said, "I agree with Li. These people from the Spirit God Sect must have died from losing their souls. There isn't any sign of brain damage. Therefore, they didn't suffer powerful impacts from psychic attacks."

As they talked, Nie Tian listened, standing off to the side.

As he heard Qin Yan say that last sentence, the light of excitement appeared in his eyes. He couldn't help but take another glance at her.

Even though Qin Yan's cultivation base was the highest among those juniors, at the late Greater Heaven stage, she hadn't entered the Worldly realm and transcended her psychic power into soul power.

Therefore, she could only perceive matters with her psychic power, which meant she wouldn't be able to perceive trivial details.

However, she seemed to have come to the same conclusion as him on her own. Nie Tian couldn't help but attach more importance to her, and at the same time, be on guard against her.

Cao Qiushui seemed to have great faith in Qin Yan. He jumped out and said, "I trust your judgment."

With a gentle laugh, Qin Yan turned to Qian Xin and said, "Even though we didn't kill them, we'd better get rid of these corpses. Otherwise, powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect might

discover them and turn this area inside out searching for their murderers. Once they find us, they will probably connect their deaths to us.”

Qin Xin nodded and whispered an order to a member of the Pill Pavilion Sect.

The man took out a dark-green potion and poured some on the chest of each corpse.

Wisps of green smoke rose from the corpses, and moments later, all of the corpses melted away, not even leaving a bone.

The man gathered the victims’ rings of holding and spiritual tools, divided them up, and handed them to Dong Li, Cao Qiushui, Gu Haofeng, and Qin Yan.

Seeing the corpses being reduced to nothing but blood, Nie Tian felt a numbness in his scalp.

Han Mu saw through his confusion and thus explained to him, “That thing is called a Carcass Melting Potion, a product of the Pill Pavilion Sect. When men die and their spiritual power dissipates, they’re nothing more than piles of meat. Then, a few drops of the Carcass Melting Potion will easily melt their bodies. However, it won’t be so effective on living people, so you don’t need to be nervous about it.”

Nie Tian frowned. “The Carcass Melting Potion will easily melt a man’s body as long as he’s dead?”

“Not necessarily.” Han Mu shook his head. “Some people emphasize the cultivation of their fleshy bodies, and thus possess outstandingly strong fleshy bodies. Even when they are dead, their bones, flesh, and blood will contain significant amounts of power. So for that kind people, the Carcass Melting Potion won’t work so well.”

Nie Tian nodded, showing that he understood.

Cao Qiushui waved at the crowd. “Let’s go back.”

Everyone grew vigilant due to the mysterious deaths of the Spirit God Sect Qi warriors . They rapidly returned to the location where the others were gathered.

Dong Li and the other young leaders informed the Worldly realm experts who had stayed behind of their findings, as well as their speculations.

After hearing their descriptions, Dong Mingxuan's expression grew grim. "I hope that's not the work of a Phantasm."

Dong Li was taken aback. "A Phantasm!"

Dong Mingxuan let out a sigh. "Sucking away their enemies' souls and turning them into Specters is the Phantasms' classic attack method."

Dong Li gasped. "The Phantasms' classic attack method?!"

"From what I know, the incantations the disciples of the Spirit God Sect practice seem to have something to do with the Phantasms," Dong Mingxuan said with knitted brows. "Many many years ago, Qi warriors from the Spirit God Sect discovered a few Phantasm relics in the Realm of Dark Underworld. From those relics, they derived the profound truths of souls. After adding in their own understanding and through centuries of modification, they eventually formed their own unique incantations."

"People from the Spirit God Sect don't have some sort of relationship with the Phantasms, do they?" Dong Li asked.

"I don't think so," said Dong Mingxuan, "After all, by the time the Spirit God Sect was established in the Realm of Dark Underworld, the Phantasms in this realm had already been killed or driven out of the Domain of the Falling Stars by powerful experts from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace. They only separated and studied the part that was fit for human cultivators from the Phantasms' incantations, and derived their own incantations from it.

“It’s not likely that they have any connections with the Phantasms. Otherwise, the other powerful sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars would have annihilated them.”

At that moment, Cao Qiushui called out, “Alright, everybody be careful. Let’s move out!”

As the team got back on the road, Nie Tian continued to keep a low profile, and they discovered more dead human bodies in a few more locations.

Some of them were from the Flame God Sect, some were from the Spirit God Sect, but the majority of them seemed to be from a few other local sects that were less influential and powerful.

The corpses were almost identical to the first ones they had encountered; every single one of them had their soul sucked away.

The recurring groups of corpses clouded everyone’s mind like a haze, making them gradually realize that unforeseen events might happen during this exploration trip to the Phantasm relic.

A few days passed...

Under Cao Qiushui’s leadership, the team came to a vast mountain valley. The moment they arrived, Nie Tian caught sight of a few of the Specters that Cao Qiushui had mentioned.

A faint, gray, misty layer of phantasm Qi filled the bottom of the valley, within which Specters could be seen floating about, as if they were patrolling.

None of them were in solid form. Instead, they looked like clusters of gray clouds. The more powerful ones were vaguely in human shapes, though their faces were still obscured and distorted.

Strange energy fluctuations spread out from within them, carrying a frigid and gruesome aura as they dispersed into their surroundings.

After a quick glance. Cao Qiushui couldn't help but exclaim, "There are several times more Specters here now than the last time I was here! What happened during this period of time? Why did so many more Specters pop out so abruptly?"

"Those new Specters are from the dead humans we encountered on our way," Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect said with an expressionless face. "If I'm not mistaken, the miserable deaths of those cultivators were the work of a Phantasm... or Phantasms."

Just like the others, Nie Tian's expression flickered dramatically upon hearing Shen Zhong's words. "Phantasms!"

Aaaahhh!

A bloodcurdling scream rang out from the depths of the misty valley, which sounded like a man's last scream before death.

"Someone is in there!" Qian Xin exclaimed.

Chapter 414: A Warning

With a grim expression, Dong Mingxuan turned to remind the crowd in a loud voice, “Be extra careful, everyone! If there are no mishaps, it’s almost certain that we’ll encounter Phantasms. We’ve all heard about Phantasms, but none of us have ever had direct contact with one, including me. It’s widely established that Phantasms are oddly powerful, so we need to prepare ourselves for the upcoming encounters.”

The echoing sound of the man’s agonized scream died out.

Realizing the dangerous situation they were in, Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect couldn’t help but step forward and remind the crowd of youngsters, “It seems that we’ll need to pass those Specters before we worry about encountering Phantasms. I believe that many of you don’t have experience dealing with Specters. I’ve got some tips for you. Specters are in an absolute soul form. Some specific attributes work especially well on them. Flame power and lightning power attacks have been proven to be the most effective.

“If you practice these sorts of incantations or possess these sorts of spiritual tools, make sure you cast your attacks where the Specters are most closely packed.

“Attacks of other attributes won’t have much effect on them. Bear this in mind.”

Nie Tian’s expression flickered. “Flame power attacks!”

“Stay close and be careful. Let’s move out!” Shen Zhong called out.

“Also, the bottom of the valley is filled with phantasm Qi. Remember to surround yourselves with spiritual power shields.” Dong Mingxuan reminded the crowd.

Originally, these Worldly realm experts didn’t plan to take any significant part in this trial for the juniors. However, the

appearance of the Specters and signs of Phantasms made even them feel insecure and uneasy. Therefore, they felt the need to remind the juniors so that they wouldn't walk into danger unwittingly and suffer great losses.

Upon hearing Shen Zhong and Dong Mingxuan's words, everyone felt as if they were facing formidable foes. Immediately after they finished speaking, Nie Tian saw spiritual power shields of various colors spread out from the people from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

He glanced around and discovered that everyone was summoning their spiritual power to form protective wards around themselves.

Without the slightest hesitation, he summoned some flame power from his vortex of flame power, mixed it with some spiritual power, and formed a fiery light shield around him.

"Follow me everyone."

Dong Mingxuan said to Dong Li and the other Dong Clan members, telling them to hold their horses and not to march past him.

With these words, he marched into the valley along with Shen Zhong and Qiu Liang from the Pill Pavilion Sect, the old lady Zhou Ruyun from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, and Gu Han from the Gu Clan. They led the juniors into the mountain valley.

Walking beside Han Mu, Nie Tian observed his surroundings with rapt attention, and noticed that the Specters that floated about in the vicinity had clearly sensed their existence, yet none of them came at them.

It seemed as if they were restrained by the special environment in the valley, and thus were only able to wander within the valley.

However, the moment Shen Zhong and the other powerful experts set foot in the valley, the Specters that were wandering within the faint phantasm Qi swooped towards them like fierce

beasts that had smelled blood.

Qiu Liang from the Pill Pavilion Sect let out a cold harrumph. With a swing of his arm, a red pill shot forward.

The pill was the size of his thumb, with detailed, fiery patterns on its surface. As soon as it flew out, it burst into blazing flames.

The size of the pill gradually shrunk, though the flames it unleashed grew increasingly fierce, and covered an increasingly large area.

Like a special sort of fuel, the blazing pill gradually formed an elliptical ring of flames as it shot directly towards the Specters.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

As the Specters with distorted faces made contact with the fiery ring, one after another, they rapidly scattered in all directions, as if they had been burned by the blazing flames.

“Let me clear a path for you.” As Qiu Liang, who practiced flame incantations, marched in the forefront and cast out crimson pills continuously, a hint of arrogance could be seen in his eyes.

Immediately after leaving his hands, the pills formed numerous fiery rings, which almost entirely filled the area ahead of the team, causing the temperature to soar in the cold, gruesome mountain valley.

The few dozen Specters that had pounced on them let out sharp shrieks as soon as they were touched by those fiery rings, as if the flames were beyond bearable to them. The weaker ones even caught fire. Like misty, gray clouds, they shrunk down and eventually dissipated.

Even though the stronger ones were able to escape after being touched by the flames, they no longer dared to get anywhere close to those spinning, fiery rings. They could only let out ear-piercing screams from a safe distance.

Seeing that Qiu Liang, who was an expert in flame incantations, had already warded off the incoming Specters with the Blaze Pills he had made himself, Dong Mingxuan and the other powerful experts didn't join the action.

Driven by Qiu Liang's exquisite incantation, the fiery rings spread out and formed a large, rotating circle around the entire team.

As the Blaze Pills gradually consumed their energy and grew smaller, they continued to spin and ward off the Specters' attacks.

With Qiu Liang forming a protective circle around them, the juniors almost didn't need to do anything. As long as they stayed within the circle, they would be safe from the Specters' attacks.

Nie Tian followed the team deeper into the mountain valley.

The moment he set foot in the bottom of the valley, he noticed that the seven stars that hung above his soul sea started to shine with dazzling light.

Up till this point, he hadn't used the power with those fragmentary stars to form Heaven Eyes, yet as soon as they started to shine in his soul, both his perception and senses heightened noticeably.

Eyes narrowed, he examined the environment with his increasingly keen perception.

Thanks to the mysterious power from the seven fragmentary stars in his soul, he sensed that the bottom of the valley seemed to be wreathed in a special magnetic field, which had some sort of profound effect on people's souls.

It was because he had entered it that the normally-quiet fragmentary stars in his soul began to shine brilliantly.

It seemed as if the fragmentary stars had sensed danger, and took the initiative to guard Nie Tian's soul against potential attacks.

After realizing this, he quietly approached Dong Li and whispered in her ear, “Tell your men to gather their strength and guard their souls. I suspect that unusual things might happen to us in this valley. Someone or something might target our souls.”

Dong Li’s watery eyes lit up. “Are you sure?”

After entering the valley, she had also grown suspicious of the special environment. However, she couldn’t perceive the anomaly like Nie Tian. All she could do was raise her guard.

Meanwhile, it seemed that none of the Worldly realm experts, who had transformed their psychic power into soul power, were affected by the strange magnetic field in the valley, or experienced any sort of discomfort.

Nie Tian seemed to be the only one who had sensed the anomaly the moment he stepped into the valley.

Then, as soon as the seven fragmentary stars in his soul lit up, he no longer felt insecure and uneasy, as if the fragmentary stars could protect him from any harm from the strange magnetic field.

“I’m not completely sure bad things will happen, but it doesn’t hurt to be more careful,” Nie Tian said in a low voice.

Since Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts didn’t seem to notice any anomalies after entering the valley, he slightly doubted his own judgment. Thus, he didn’t guarantee Dong Li that he would be right.

At this moment, Dong Mingxuan and the other Worldly realm experts were marching in the front and focused on the Specters around them. Therefore, none of them overheard his conversation with Dong Li.

Dong Li pondered briefly, then chose to trust Nie Tian’s judgment. She summoned Han Mu to her side and instructed him to inform the other Dong Clan members.

Afterwards, Han Mu rapidly moved about among the Dong Clan

Qi warriors, delivering Dong Li's instructions.

Even though they didn't understand the reason behind it, they followed Dong Li's instructions and warded their souls with psychic power.

Since Nie Tian said himself that he wasn't sure about this, Dong Li only gave instructions to her men. She was afraid that nothing would really happen and the others would laugh at her for being overly suspicious.

Changes came without any warning.

A bloodcurdling screech suddenly echoed out from the depths of the valley.

At the same time, a layer of cyan energy spread out and rapidly covered the pale-gray, sparsely vegetated walls of the mountain peaks on both sides of the valley.

As soon as the cyan energy ripples appeared, the might of the screech seemed to be greatly enhanced.

All of a sudden, every Qi warrior from the Realm of a Hundred Battles felt as if their soul had been pierced by thousands of sharp arrows.

Under Han Mu's urging, the Qi warriors from the Dong Clan had already gathered their psychic power and formed protective shields around their souls.

Like a storm of sharp arrows, countless psychic blasts shot into their protective shields, causing them to let out muffled groans and struggle to maintain their foothold.

However, the strong blow didn't inflict too much damage on their souls. Most of them came out fine.

In Nie Tian's soul, the seven fragmentary stars continued to emanate dazzling starlight, neutralizing the fierce psychic attack quietly and effortlessly.

Standing unwavering like Mount Tai, he didn't stagger in the slightest.

Chapter 415: Psychic Attack

However, many of the Qi warriors from the other clans, who were at the middle or late Greater Heaven stage, suddenly fell to the ground with blood coming out of their ears and eyes.

Even worse, some early Greater Heaven stage cultivators, who hadn't spent much time forging their soul sea and thus didn't possess significant psychic power, were caught off-guard. With their souls pierced, they died instantly.

Dong Mingxuan's face turn pale with fright as he reminded everyone loudly, "Watch out! It's the Phantasms' psychic attack!"

However, his reminder came a little late.

After yelling out these words, he looked over his shoulder and discovered that some early Greater Heaven stage members who weren't skilled at using their psychic power had already collapsed to the ground upon the strong impact from the Phantasms' psychic attack. With their souls riddled with holes or simply shattered, many died instant deaths.

Even those with higher cultivation bases had fallen to the ground, where they hastily fetched medicinal pills with grim expressions to cure the injuries to their souls.

All of them had focused on protecting themselves from the corrosive phantasm Qi with their spiritual power shields, but had ignored the defense of their souls.

As soon as the sharp screech echoed out, they all took serious blows. They were either killed or severely injured, their miserable wails filling the air.

"Hmm?!" Dong Mingxuan couldn't help but exclaim as he set his eyes on the Dong Clan's Qi warriors, confusion appearing on his face.

At this moment, the other Worldly realm experts who had been

marching in the front, as well as Cao Qiushui, Qian Xin, Gu Haofeng, and Qin Yan, all noticed the Dong Clan members' condition: none of them died or had blood coming out of their eyes and ears.

All of them seemed unharmed by the Phantasms' psychic attack.

Each and every one of them cast their shocked and admiring gaze towards Dong Li, as they were all very grateful for her wise instructions.

“Our Miss is so awesome!”

“We made the right decision by following her!”

“Without our Miss' reminder, none of us would have been able to ward off the Phantasms' psychic attack. We would either have been killed or severely injured!”

Respect and admiration filled their eyes as they looked at her.

However, under her subordinates' gazes, Dong Li's expression grew somewhat uneasy, as she secretly felt ashamed.

“Dong Li!!” Cao Qiushui couldn't help but yell at her. “How come your men are the only ones who are unhurt? If you knew what was going to happen, why didn't you remind us?!”

Qian Xin and Gu Haofeng's expressions also grew unpleasant.

Even Qin Yan's expression grew grim as she stepped over and asked with her eyes fixed on Dong Li, “What's that about, Li?”

Dong Li hadn't expected the change would take place so abruptly and catch everyone else off guard.

By the time she realized she should have told everyone, it was already too late. People from the other clans or sects had already sustained different degrees of injuries.

“Well... I wasn't sure that the Phantasms would launch psychic attacks,” Dong Li said with a deeply embarrassed expression on her face. “I was going to let Han Mu inform you guys about my

speculation after he finished informing my men. However, who would have known that the change would come so abruptly?”

“This is not the time to place blame!” Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect called out. “Everyone, learn from your lesson and do your best to guard your souls! There’s something strange about this place. The moment that screech echoed out, the mountain walls on both sides seemed to have enhanced its might. I should taken some of the responsibility, as I failed to notice the anomaly and discover what the Phantasms were up to.”

Upon hearing his words, everyone shut their mouths and hastily gathered their psychic power to form defenses protecting their souls, lest more psychic attacks should come.

Just as they expected, soon after their defenses were raised, another screech rang out.

Hearing the screech, the well-prepared crowd looked at the mountain walls on both sides of the valley as they summoned psychic power to defend their souls.

The sparsely vegetated mountain walls were once again covered in watery, cyan energy. Immediately afterwards, the might of the ear-piercing screech skyrocketed. Like tens of thousands of sharp arrows, they shot towards everyone’s souls.

However, since everyone was prepared, they did their utmost to defend against them. Some of them let out muffled groans, but no one was seriously injured.

Qian Xin let out a cold harrumph and called out, “Dong Li! Next time you discover any anomalies, let us know, alright?”

“Of course, I will!” Dong Li said, grievance filling her stomach. “I was going to remind you. It was just that it happened too fast.”

“That’d better be it.” Qian Xin seemed very displeased. “We’re all from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, and we’ve worked with each other many times. I hope we can trust each other instead of

harboring disloyalty! Please save your schemes for our enemies!”

Dong Li seemed rather embarrassed.

After the incident, everyone raised their guard and didn't rush into the depths of the valley.

Everyone guarded their souls tightly, worrying that they would face more psychic attacks.

However, the Phantasms at the depths of the valley seemed to have discovered that their psychic attacks were no longer effective, and thus stopped attacking them with screeches.

With gritted teeth, Dong Li shot Nie Tian a nasty look and said, “Wu Tian, you come here and march by my side!”

The two of them marched side by side after Dong Mingxuan. Behind them were Han Mu and the other Dong Clan members.

“You got me good!” Dong Li said with a low voice.

Innocence filled Nie Tian's face as he said, “What?! Without my reminder, at least two of your men would have died, and the others would have sustained serious injuries to their souls. There would be no way that they would be safe and well like they are now!”

“That's not what I mean.” Dong Li seemed somewhat edgy. “Since you noticed the anomaly, you should have been more certain and clear about it. Everyone is suspicious about my intentions because of you!”

“That's because I wasn't completely certain myself!” Nie Tian explained.

“Forget about it.” Dong Li was angry at Nie Tian's ambiguity as well as her own indecision, which had led to the fact that she had only informed her own subordinates, and the others then raised suspicion and discontent towards her.

“From now on, let me know as soon as you find any anomalies!” She said in a low voice.

“Okay...” Nie Tian coldly.

At that moment, Shen Zhong, who was marching in the front, turned around and said to Qian Xin, who was marching behind him, “Keep an eye out for that kid beside Dong Li. There’s something unusual about him.”

Qian Xin was taken aback. “That Wu Tian person?”

Shen Zhong nodded vigorously. “He was the one who told Dong Li that those people from the Spirit God Sect had died from having their souls taken away.

“Also, did you notice that he was completely unaffected by both psychic attacks?

“Dong Li’s other subordinates were also reminded in time. Every single one of them has a cultivation base higher than his, yet they all staggered and struggled to maintain a firm foothold.

“Only Wu Tian was completely uninfluenced. That doesn’t make sense.”

After hearing Shen Zhong’s analysis, Qian Xin, who was also from the Pill Pavilion Sect, realized that Nie Tian might have some secrets.

Qin Yan from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce also grew suspicious. Originally, she had been marching rather far from Dong Li. But now, she moved to a position closer to her, where she constantly snuck glances at Dong Li and Nie Tian, who were communicating in low voices.

She knew about Nie Tian’s actual identity, and she knew Dong Li very well.

From the details she had picked up, she suspected that Nie Tian, who was being berated by Dong Li, had been the one to have sensed the danger.

“It must have been him!” Qin Yan muttered to herself.

WHOOSH!

At that very moment, gray, misty souls rose from the top of the heads of the corpses, who had died from the Phantasms' psychic attack.

As the discarnate souls flew out, not only did they not dissipate into heaven and earth, but they also rapidly absorbed the faint phantasm Qi and quickly morphed into Specters, before beginning to attack their former clansmen.

Two men, who seemed to have been close friends of one of the deceased, were taken by surprise while they were grieving over their friend's death.

The dead man's gray misty soul morphed into a wisp of cyan smoke and shot directly into their heads, where it ravaged their souls.

The two of them cried out as they used the psychic defenses they had formed to fight the Specter that used to be their friend.

Dong Mingxuan realized what was happening and exclaimed, "Something is not right! The souls of the deceased are not disappearing. They must be influenced by the Phantasms' magics!

"Listen to me everyone! Destroy your dead friends' discarnate souls as quickly as possible. Otherwise, their discarnate souls will absorb the phantasm Qi in this region and turn into Specters!"

Upon hearing these words, the people who were standing beside their deceased friends started destroying their friends' discarnate souls, fighting off their grief.

One gray, misty soul after another was rapidly bombarded and scattered before they could take advantage of the special environment and morph into Specters.

After a major scuffle, the two men, who had their souls invaded by the Specter, finally held on to their souls and survived the attack, their faces ghastly.

Even though the discarnate souls of the deceased members had been destroyed one after another, everyone's hearts grew increasingly heavy.

Though protected by Qiu Liang's fiery ring, they had already lost many people, and they hadn't even marched through the valley yet.

According to Cao Qiushui, this valley was only a defensive mechanism. The Phantasm relic was located in the lake behind it.

Now, they truly felt the dreadfulness of the Phantasms.

Chapter 416: The Might of Thunder!

With grim expressions, the explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles marched on cautiously, as if they were walking on thin ice.

The strange environment, the large pack of Specters, and the Phantasms that lurked in the dark and unleashed screeches made the explorers grow increasingly vigilant.

With an expressionless face, Nie Tian marched on beside Dong Li.

Dong Li had learned from her previous lesson. Every once in a while, she would stop to ask Nie Tian for his discoveries in a low voice.

Nie Tian, who didn't discover any more anomalies, shook his head to let her know that everything looked good.

Only after seeing Nie Tian shake his head would Dong Li put her mind at ease and start marching again.

Meanwhile, she noticed that Qin Yan and Qian Xin would turn to glance at them from time to time.

Therefore, she was increasingly careful when she communicated with Nie Tian, fearing that Qian Xin and the others would question her intentions, and thus jeopardize the unity of the whole team.

Qiu Liang from the Pill Pavilion Sect seemed to possess a substantial amount of Blaze Pills. Marching at the forefront, he continued to cast them, forming new blazing rings.

The Specters floating about in the phantasm Qi were by nature afraid of flames, and thus didn't dare to charge into the blazing defense.

After marching for a few more minutes...

The cold bodies of three dead Spirit God Sect Qi warriors entered

the teams' sight. Each of them had blood coming out of their bulging eyes.

They seemed to have died from the same cause as the corpses they had discovered before.

Cao Qiushui let out a sigh and said, "It seems that people from the Spirit God Sect have found this place after all. Apparently, it was the Specter activities in the area that exposed this Phantasm relic. I just hope that the truly powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect haven't received word and come over to this place."

Dong Mingxuan looked off into the depths of the valley, saying, "You're right, it might be more troublesome if they come. Their incantations have profound connections to the Phantasms' incantations. For thousands of years, they have never given up exploring Phantasm relics.

"They've hoped that they could solve more profound mysteries and gain more knowledge from relics the Phantasms left behind.

"If the Spirit God Sect is aware that another Phantasm relic has been discovered in the Realm of Dark Underworld, they probably would have turned out in full force to unveil the secrets within it.

"That would be terrible news for us."

The crowd whispered to each other as they marched by the dead Spirit God Sect Qi warriors and deeper into the valley.

The further in they went, the more floating Specters they could see.

Not only that, but the sizes of the Specters became larger, and their faces became clearer.

Apparently, the Specters in the depths of the valley weren't just the discarnate souls of human Qi warriors, but some of them were clearly the discarnate souls of spirit beasts.

That meant that humans weren't the only ones that had been

killed and made into Specters, but powerful, local spirit beasts too.

ROOOOAR!

All of a sudden, a gray Specter wreathed in rich, cyan phantasm Qi flew out of the depths of the valley.

It seemed to be the discarnate soul of a formidable spirit beast. It had a set of huge, bat-like wings, and with a cyan face and sharp fangs, its face was clear and recognizable. Dong Mingxuan's expression flickered. "A Demonface Blood Bat!"

Demonface Blood Bats were a kind of spirit beast that could only be found in the Realm of Dark Underworld. As fifth grade spirit beasts, their strength equaled that of Worldly realm experts.

It was said that Demonface Blood Bats were one of the oldest species in the Realm of Dark Underworld. Supposedly, they even had been closely related to the Phantasms when they had dominated this realm.

Back then, the Phantasms had the custom of breeding Demonface Blood Bats and using them as mounts.

Even though this Demonface Blood Bat that had appeared out of nowhere was also a Specter, it seemed to emanate a peculiar aura of flesh and blood.

WHOOSH!

In the blink of an eye, the Demonface Blood Bat broke through Qiu Liang's fiery circle.

Screeching, it flew past Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts, who were each able to inflict serious damage on it, and swooped toward the location where the Gu Clan members were gathered, as if it possessed intelligence.

An extremely brutal and bloodthirsty expression appeared on its sinister, fanged face.

Standing behind Gu Haofeng, a middle Greater Heaven stage Gu

Clan member brandished the golden sword in his hand to form a dazzling, golden light screen, hoping to stop it.

However, the Demonface Blood Bat didn't show the slightest fear, and burst through the golden light screen completely unscathed.

PHOOH! PHOOH!

The Demonface Blood Bat, which should have been in an intangible form, ripped the man's throat out with its sharp claws.

While reminding his subordinates to be careful at the top of his lungs, Gu Haofeng took out a cyan thunderball and used it to bombard the Demonface Blood Bat.

BOOOOOM!

Upon exploding, the thunderball gave rise to great amounts of lightning, as well as loud rolls of thunder.

Blasted by the mighty thunderball, the gray Demonface Blood Bat, which used to be a fifth grade spirit beast, scattered and disappeared, leaving cyan fumes lingering in the air.

"Thunder power is indeed very effective on Specters!"

With a cold laugh, Gu Haofeng lifted his sword wreathed in lightning and sparks with one hand and took out another thunderball with the other.

He jumped to his subordinate's side, who had died at the Demonface Blood Bat's claws, and then smashed the man's head in with his sword.

As his sword crushed his subordinate's skull, Nie Tian saw a wisp of cyan smoke dissipate like a candle that had gone out.

Before the man's discarnate soul could absorb the phantasm Qi and morph into a Specter, Gu Haofeng destroyed it and eliminated that possibility.

He took a deep breath and said to his other subordinates with a

grim expression, “These are perilous times. From now on, no matter who among us dies, you shouldn’t be held back by your emotions. You should destroy their souls as soon as they die, so that they don’t come back as Specters and attack you!”

With pale faces, his subordinates nodded at him gently.

They were well-aware that their young lord was known as a merciless person. Therefore, none of them expected him to be held back by his lord-servant relationship with them when a critical time came.

“That’s right!” Gu Han, the Worldly realm expert from the Gu Clan, said with a nod, as if he approved of Gu Haofeng’s statement very much.

Dong Mingxuan also turned around and addressed the other Dong Clan members, “Gu Hanfeng is right. The Specters we’ll encounter from here forward will be in larger numbers and more powerful. None of you should be soft-hearted on this matter! Once your companion is dead, he or she will no longer be your companion, but rather something that will become a Specter! You must never show mercy when you deal with them, and you must kill them at the first possible moment!”

“Got it,” Dong Li said in a low voice.

“Be careful, Qiu Liang,” Shen Zhong reminded. “Specters more powerful than that Demonface Blood Bat might be waiting ahead of us. Such powerful Specters will have no problem breaking through your blazing rings.”

“Sure.” Qiu Liang also realized that, due to his arrogance, he hadn’t taken the initiative to attack the Demonface Blood Bat with his fiery rings. Because of that, it had burst through his defenses effortlessly and killed one of Gu Haofeng’s subordinates with a single strike.

After the team resumed their march, many more powerful

Specters popped up just as Shen Zhong had predicted.

Some of them had transformed from high grade spirit beasts, while others had transformed from powerful human Qi warriors. The more powerful they had been when they were alive, the more powerful they would be after they had been turned into Specters.

As more and more Specters swarmed out from the depths of the valley, Qiu Liang found it increasingly difficult to handle their attacks.

It wasn't very long before many powerful Specters burst through Qiu Liang's fiery defense and charged into the crowd of explorers.

Every junior, including Nie Tian, became those Specters' targets. Without any hesitation, he summoned his flame power to form a blazing shield around him. Then, he formed beams of flames with the Flame Spirit Incantation and used them to bash the incoming Specters.

Thanks to Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts, the powerful Specters were wiped out soon after they burst through Qiu Liang's defense.

Gu Haofeng's performance in battle turned out to be the most eye-catching among the juniors.

The lightning-wreathed sword in his hand and his thunderballs seemed to become the bane of the Specters.

Even though his cultivation base wasn't very outstanding, by relying on his lightning and thunder incantations, the destructive damage he dealt to the Specters matched even that of the Worldly realm experts.

Surrounded by slithering cyan lightning, he stepped forward, holding his sword and with an arrogant expression on his face.

No matter how fierce the Specters were, they would naturally cower when facing him.

As the team continued to march forward, Gu Haofeng gradually moved to the forefront with Dong Mingxuan, Shen Zhong, and the other Worldly realm experts.

Under his protection, none of his subordinates were threatened by any Specters.

Meanwhile, the Worldly realm experts seemed to trust him. Not only did they not get angry seeing him stepping to the forefront, but they even praised him for shouldering their pressure voluntarily.

Gradually, Gu Haofeng's thunderballs played an increasingly significant role in killing Specters.

Later, Qiu Liang even intentionally gave Gu Haofeng chances to kill more Specters, knowing he was able to handle them.

Since thunder and lightning were the Specters' worst natural enemies, by relying on his substantial amount of thunderballs, Gu Haofeng soon became the most prominent junior in the mountain valley.

Gu Haofeng enjoyed the feeling very much. He laughed broadly as he cleared a safe path that was filled with lightning and rolling thunder for the whole team using his sword and thunderballs.

Chapter 417: No Turning Back

Dong Li curled her lips and said disdainfully, “Look at that arrogant shmuck.

“He just happened to have practiced the type of incantations that turned out to be the most effective on Specters. What else does he have? Considering his cultivation base and strength, if he were facing opponents who weren’t so afraid of thunder or lightning, he would have suffered a great loss already.”

Expressionless, Nie Tian didn’t say a word.

However, it seemed that Dong Li didn’t really care what Nie Tian’s take on this matter was, and thus she continued to mutter to herself, “This guy’s probably going to get the largest share of the loot after our exploration is over. Every time we went on exploration trips together before, we divided the loot according to everyone’s contribution, instead of evenly.

“The person who made the most contributions would get to choose first when the time came to split up the loot.

“Now, since this guy has killed so many Specters by relying on his thunder incantations and thunderballs, he’s already way ahead of us, contribution-wise. If there are no mishaps, he’ll get the most valuables after we finish exploring the Phantasm relic.”

With these words, Dong Li grew angry again. She shot a dirty look at Nie Tian before saying, “If I had known that what you said was really going to happen, I would have warned everyone, and it would have been considered a major contribution on my part. By the time the exploration trip was over, the seniors would probably have kept that meritorious service in mind, and given me a larger share of the loot. This is all because you didn’t make yourself clear!”

Nie Tian rolled his eyes at her and said coldly, “You’re crazy!”

“You!!!” Glaring at him, Dong Li was just about to lash out when she realized that Qin Yan was looking at them. She hastily held her tongue and said with a low voice, “Wu Tian! You’d better behave yourself from now on. If you perform well enough and win me extra loot, I’ll make sure you get your share after this whole is finished!”

“Sure...” Nie Tian sounded rather indifferent.

Dong Li’s slender eyebrows furrowed slightly.

Seeing that her attempt to provoke Nie Tian had failed, she felt increasingly angry. However, she couldn’t think of a better method.

Han Mu was right about her and Dong Baijie; the two of them would only attach importance to those who could beat them or make them suffer losses.

Back in the Realm of Split Void, Nie Tian had destroyed her operation in the forest, which she had spent a long time planning. When she had called upon numerous other Hunter organizations to capture him together, she had failed again.

Even not long ago, she had been very confident that she would easily overtake Nie Tian with her black phoenix’s fully-developed strength, yet she had once again failed.

After being repeatedly bested by Nie Tian, she had actually grown somewhat respectful towards him.

She had a feeling that Nie Tian would be able to help her gain a sizable fortune during this exploration trip. It was this indescribable feeling that had driven her to scheme and coerce Nie Tian into joining the exploration team.

However, she was fully aware that, even if Nie Tian refused to contribute, she wouldn’t be able to do anything to him, since her instincts told her that Dong Baijie had secretly met with him.

She suspected that her older brother had said something to Nie

Tian. Therefore, it probably wouldn't work if she threatened him with the safety of his family and friends from the Cloudsoaring Sect.

Nie Tian had killed a large number of Dark Moon Qi warriors and Hunters in the Realm of Split Void, and looted quite a fortune from them.

Meanwhile, since the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect from the Realm of a Thousand Devastations seemed to attach great importance to Nie Tian, and his current cultivation base wasn't very profound, he didn't seem to worry about needing spiritual materials.

Not being able to lure him in with spiritual materials, she could only try something else.

After a brief pondering, she suddenly pursed her lips into a smile, and stepped closer to Nie Tian. Her flattering eyes narrowed as she said to him with an extremely gentle and low voice, "That girl Pei Qiqi has always been cold like a rock to you. Don't you find her boring? If you help me with everything within your power, I'll let you get intimate with me when this trip ends. How's that?"

Shock spread across Nie Tian's face as he turned to look her in the eyes.

Not wearing a mask, Dong Li, who was smiling broadly, looked as beautiful as a blossoming flower. Adding in her inviting stance, she looked like every man's dream.

If he didn't know how cunning and vicious she was, he might actually have been aroused.

However, as Nie Tian looked at her smiling face now, he saw a deadly scorpion. While raising his guard, he stepped backwards to put some distance between them and said, "As far as I know, all those who have attempted to get intimate with you are all piles of dried bones now. I still want to hold onto my life for a little longer, so thank you for the invitation, but I'll pass."

Dong Li burst into a flaming rage. “Unappreciative asshole!”

Her plan to seduce Nie Tian hadn’t worked. However, her actions had caught Gu Haofeng’s attention, who was marching at the front.

Seeing her talk to Nie Tian so flirtatiously, he instantly grew furious. With a violent swing of his hand, he cast out a number of thunderballs, bombarding the Specters hovering in front of him, leaving nothing but cyan fumes and miserable screams in the air.

Thanks to his effort, the remaining Specters that had been blocking the long mountain valley finally scattered.

Gu Haofeng was the first to pass through the valley, and stood in an open area. Upon getting a glimpse of the vast terrain before his eyes, he gasped and exclaimed, “My god!”

Upon hearing his exclamation, the Worldly realm experts also rushed out of the valley.

Dong Li also sensed the anomaly. She stopped bickering with Nie Tian and also ran out of the valley.

Nie Tian went after her.

There was a lake not far from where they were standing, which was wreathed in misty, cyan phantasm Qi.

Thousands of Specters were hovering within the phantasm Qi, which was far denser than the phantasm Qi in the valley. Meanwhile, the sounds of battle kept echoing out from the areas around the lake, where large numbers of huge, oddly-shaped rocks could be seen.

It seemed that other Qi warriors had beaten them to this place. However, since the huge rocks blocked their sight, they couldn’t see what they were fighting.

Numerous human corpses were scattered around the lake shore, each of which had bulging eyes and blood coming out of their eyes.

Apparently, they had died from having their souls taken away.

A large number of Specters were screeching as they hovered in the rich phantasm Qi over the lake, which hurt Nie Tian's eardrums and shook his soul.

A few vague figures could be seen among the Specters, as if they were controlling them.

From the look of it, those vague figures were the so-called Phantasms. They blended in with the Specters around them. They would appear every once in a while, though they couldn't be located most of the time.

Staring at the bizarre scene above the lake, Cao Qiushui muttered, flabbergasted, "W-what happened here?"

The Phantasm relic is in the depths of that lake. But now that so many Specters and Phantasms are hovering above the lake, what should we do?"

BOOM!

At that moment, a loud sound rang out from the mountain valley behind them.

Nie Tian jerked his head back to see what was happening.

He saw that a wall of faint, cyan light had suddenly appeared at the mouth of the valley, cutting them off from the path they had taken to get here.

Three of Dong Li's subordinates hadn't come out of the valley when the wall of cyan light appeared, and thus they were separated from the group.

With Gu Haofeng and the Worldly realm experts out of the valley, the Specters regrouped and madly attacked the people who were now trapped in the valley.

Surrounded by numerous Specters, one trapped Qi warrior after another went down.

By the time Dong Mingxuan, Shen Zhong, and the others realized what was going on and rushed back to their rescue, they found that they couldn't go through the wall of cyan light.

Gu Haofeng bombarded the ward repeatedly with his thunderballs, yet the cyan ward didn't change a bit.

Then, they watched their friends from the Realm of a Hundred Battles become swamped by a large number of Specters, while there was nothing they could do.

With ghastly faces, everyone wracked their minds for a way to save their companions.

However, even Shen Zhong and Dong Mingxuan couldn't break the strange ward, which was apparently created by the powerful Phantasms after exhausting all of their power.

It wasn't long before everyone stopped making attempts one after another.

The reason was that all those who hadn't passed through the valley in time were killed by the Specters.

Cao Qiushui's face turned pale as he watched discarnate souls rising from the cold corpses of the Cao Clan members, who used to be his friends, absorbing phantasm Qi, and transforming into Specters. "There's no going back now..."

Nie Tian's heart also grew incomparably heavy.

Chapter 418: Relic at the Lake Bottom

Up to this point, one third of the explorers from the five major forces in the Realm of a Hundred Battles had died.

The crowd of survivors fell silent as they gazed at the wall of cyan light and the Specters beyond it that used to be their companions.

They realized that returning through the valley was no longer an option.

They could only choke back their grief and turn around. Instead of dwelling on what was happening behind them, they needed to focus on the problems that awaited them.

“Let’s go find out who’s fighting over there!” With these words, Shen Zhong took the initiative to dash off towards the area where the sounds of fighting were coming from.

Seeing Shen Zhong leave, the others sped off after him, as if they were afraid that more mishaps would happen if they stayed.

Having escaped a calamity, Nie Tian didn’t dare to lag behind. Therefore, he rapidly caught up with Dong Mingxuan, who was alongside Dong Li.

Feeling the uncanniness of this place, he believed that the safest way out was to stay with the Worldly realm experts.

Before long, the team came to the area filled with huge rocks, where battles were taking place.

Being the first ones to arrive, Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts stood behind a huge rock, where they observed the fierce battle between two groups of human Qi warriors with grim expressions on their faces.

Dong Li approached her martial uncle Dong Mingxuan and asked, “What’s happening here?” Confusion filled her face as her gaze swept across the battlefield.

Nie Tian also seemed rather confused, not having a clue about what was going on.

From the way they were dressed, it seemed that those engaged in battle belonged to different Qi warrior sects.

They could tell that some of them were from the Flame God Sect, and some others were from the Spirit God Sect. The rest were most likely from other smaller, local sects in the Realm of Dark Underworld.

What confused Nie Tian was that the total of several dozen Qi warriors from different sects were currently engaged in indiscriminate battles with one another.

None of them seemed to have clear or fixed targets.

Some Qi warriors from the same sect were even madly attacking each other, seemingly lost in their killing instinct.

Nie Tian observed with rapt attention, and discovered that, for every single one of them, their pupils, which should have been pitch-black, were glittering with a mysterious, cyan light .

Their expressions had also grown twisted. Even though they had the appearances of humans, they seemed to have already lost their intelligence. Their bloodthirsty nature was all they had left now.

The look in their eyes seemed no different from the look in the Specters' eyes.

Scattered in the vicinity were a number of dead Qi warriors, all of which were riddled with holes and had obviously died miserable deaths.

CRUNCH!

A powerful expert from the Flame God Sect severed a Spirit God Sect Qi warrior's head with a sharp blade.

In the next moment, a wisp of misty, gray soul rose from the freshly-killed Spirit God Sect Qi warrior's head. As it did, it

absorbed the pure and rich phantasm Qi in the air, rapidly transforming.

Before it completely turned into a Specter, however, the discarnate soul seemed to be channeled by some mysterious power, and flew towards the area above the lake, where it joined countless other Specters.

Phantasm Qi rose continuously from the rippling, cyan lake water and converged in midair above the lake, where countless densely-packed, gray, misty Specters squirmed about and let out ear-piercing, scalp-numbing screeches.

“These people have been influenced by some sort of evil spell. They’re obsessed with killing, but they can’t distinguish between enemies and friends.” Shen Zhong felt a sense of coldness as he looked at the vague figures that were hiding among the numerous Specters above the lake. “I suppose those Phantasms are behind all this.”

The moment Shen Zhong said those words, a sharp screech, which seemed to carry a bewitching psychic power, rang out from within the crowd of Specters above the lake.

All of a sudden, the Qi warriors who were entangled with each other in fierce battles turned around and focused on the same target.

Dong Mingxuan’s expression flickered as he exclaimed, “They’re coming at us!!

“Those Qi warriors have already lost their senses. The only thing left in them now is their killing nature. They have been bewitched by the Phantasms, and they’re no longer the men they were. So don’t relent everyone! Leave none standing!”

The explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles might have been somewhat hesitant when they had faced Specters transformed from their friends.

However, they wouldn't let themselves be held back by their sympathy for the lost Qi warriors from the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Upon hearing Dong Mingxuan's order, every survivor from the Realm of a Hundred Battles charged into the battlefield without the slightest hesitation, as if they were soldiers who had heard a bugle call.

Stripped of their senses, many lost Qi warriors no longer had the ability to cast exquisite incantations or stimulate the profound spell formations within their spiritual tools.

Most of them were at the Heaven and Greater Heaven stage; none had entered the Worldly realm.

With that sort of strength, even if they hadn't lost their senses, they wouldn't have stood a chance fighting the explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, who had a few Worldly realm experts on their team, much less now.

Under the leadership of Dong Mingxuan, Shen Zhong, and the other Worldly realm experts, Nie Tian fought side by side with Dong Li, cutting the possessed ones down with his Flame Star.

Cao Qiushui from the Cao Clan was the only one who didn't join the battle.

Protected by a number of powerful Cao Clan members, he gazed into the lake, standing on the lake shore.

Entranced, he slowly bent down to examine the unfathomable, cyan lake water. Then, through the lake water, he vaguely saw the relic, which should have been at the bottom of the lake, gradually rising to the surface.

Cao Qiushui's expression grew grim.

This wasn't the first time he had been here.

He had visited this lake five years ago. With the help of a special

spiritual tool, he had sunk to the depths of this lake.

Even though the lake didn't seem very wide, it had turned out to be extremely deep.

Therefore, even with the help of that special spiritual tool, he had failed to reach the bottom of the lake.

As a result, he had returned empty-handed and in low spirits.

Several months ago, relying on a broken map he had obtained by accident, he had found this lake for the second time.

It was said on the map that mysteries were buried at the bottom of this lake.

Therefore, he had once again dived into the depths of the lake with the help of his spiritual tool.

However, he had only sunk a hundred meters into the lake when he had caught sight of the floating relic.

It seemed that he had only been able to discover the relic because it had quietly ascended from the bottom of the lake.

Today was the third time he had been to this lake.

This time, he only stood by the lakeside. He didn't even need to jump into the lake to be able to see the vague shape of the relic in the lake.

He instantly came to the conclusion that the relic had been slowly floating towards the surface the whole time.

Hence, it hadn't been his resourcefulness that had allowed him to discover it, but rather the relic's voluntary movement.

However, everything around this lake had looked normal several months ago.

There hadn't been any Specters as he passed through the mountain valley, and there hadn't been any phantasm Qi above the lake.

It seemed that something had happened recently, and triggered these changes.

Two weeks ago, he had seen a faint amount of phantasm Qi and a few Specters appear above the lake. He had sensed that something was wrong, so he had evacuated at the first possible moment, and gone back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles to put together a exploration team.

However, back then, there were far fewer Specters over the lake, and no Specters in the mountain valley.

Only two weeks had passed, and now the relic had ascended significantly; the area above the lake was covered with floating Specters, and even the mountain valley was packed with them.

What shocked him the most was that Phantasms had now appeared over the lake after having disappeared for thousands of years.

“What in the world is in that Phantasm relic? Can it be the reason why those Phantasms have traveled across the starry river to this place in meteors?” The more he thought about it, the more uneasy he became. “The Phantasms must be fully aware that the Domain of the Falling Stars is now dominated by humans, but why would they still come? Are they here to take whatever is in that relic?”

Chapter 419: Testing

The explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles didn't have much difficulty killing the local Qi warriors from the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Even Nie Tian was able to cut down a few lost members of the Flame God Sect with his Flame Star.

However, many of them failed to destroy their enemies' discarnate souls immediately after killing them, with the Worldly realm experts and Gu Haofeng being the exceptions.

Once they failed to do so, the discarnate souls would rapidly fly out of the heads of the deceased and join the sea of Specters above the lake.

The odd thing was that both the Specters above the lake and the Phantasms hidden behind them turned a blind eye to the fact that they were killing the possessed local Qi warriors.

Not a single Specter or Phantasm rushed over to attack or stop them.

The massacre ended in fifteen minutes.

Each and every possessed Qi warrior from the Realm of Dark Underworld was killed, most of whose discarnate souls escaped and joined the army of Specters.

Not the slightest joy could be seen on Dong Mingxuan's face as he looked down at the scattered corpses. Instead, he said, "I have a feeling that those Phantasms are using us to kill those local people for them."

"I have the same feeling," Shen Zhong said with a low voice.

"Something is different. The Phantasm relic in the lake is slowly floating closer to the surface of the lake. I didn't find it like this." Cao Qiushui no longer dared to hold any information back. He

went on and explained his findings and the changes that had taken place during the past few months in detail.

Qin Yan was taken aback. “What?! You mean that you came here five years ago, but didn’t discover anything in the lake. All these changes have taken place over the past few months? And you were only able to discover the relic because it started to slowly float up from the bottom of the lake?”

Cao Qiushui nodded and answered with a bitter smile, “Yeah.”

OWWW!

At that moment, spirit beast roars suddenly echoed out from a dense forest on the other side of the lake.

Startled, everyone subconsciously gazed off in the direction of the sources of the sound. However, due to the exceedingly long distance, most of them failed to see anything.

Only Dong Mingxuan, Shen Zhong, and the other Worldly realm experts seemed to have discovered what was happening after unleashing their soul power.

On the other side of the lake, a large number of spirit beasts were madly attacking one another. Eyes narrowed, Shen Zhong said with a grim expression on his face, “It seems that spirit beasts can also be influenced by the Phantasms’ secret spells. Many spirit beasts are fighting one another to the death on that side of the lake. The discarnate souls of the dead spirit beasts are also flying out and joining the army of hovering Specters above the lake.”

With powerful experts like Shen Zhong there, Nie Tian didn’t feel the need to unleash his seven Heaven Eyes.

From his description, Nie Tian learned of what was happening on the other side of the lake: numerous spirit beasts were killing each other, giving birth to many more Specters.

A streak of lightning suddenly flashed across his mind.

“The Phantasms are doing this intentionally. They must somehow need a large number of Specters!” Nie Tian gave voice to his speculations.

Almost at the same time, Dong Li, who was standing right next to him, exclaimed, “The Phantasms must be trying to build up an army of Specters!”

Qin Yan also seemed to come to a sudden enlightenment as she blurted in a loud voice, “Perhaps it was the Phantasms’ intention for the Qi warriors from the Flame God Sect, the Spirit God Sect, and the other sects to discover this place! I even suspect that it’s the Phantasms that have secretly manipulated and guided those spirit beasts to this place!”

Nie Tian, Dong Li, and Qin Yan spoke almost simultaneously.

However, since both Dong Li’s and Qin Yan’s voices were higher than Nie Tian’s, Nie Tian’s voice was practically drowned in theirs.

Dong Mingxuan, Shen Zhong, and the other Worldly realm experts seemed to have long since thought of this possibility, but they didn’t simply feed it to the juniors. Rather, they seemed to be waiting for these youngsters to figure it out on their own.

After hearing Dong Li and Qin Yan’s speculations, they all shot approving gazes at the two of them, nodding gently.

A faint smile appeared on Dong Mingxuan’s face. “Good. It seems that you two have located the problem.”

Since Nie Tian had practically whispered his speculation into Dong Li’s ear, his voice was easily drowned by Dong Li’s loud exclamation.

Although nearly everyone missed his voice, Dong Mingxuan and Shen Zhong’s somewhat surprised gazes briefly stopped on his face as they openly praised Dong Li and Qin Yan.

Nie Tian immediately realized that they had both heard his voice,

indistinguishable as it was.

However, although the two of them knew that aside from Dong Li and Qin Yan, Nie Tian had also seen the anomaly, they didn't say anything.

Perhaps Dong Li and Qin Yan were more important in their eyes.

"Anything else?" Dong Mingxuan asked.

At that moment, Gu Haofeng, Qian Xin, and Cao Qiushui also realized that their seniors were intentionally testing them.

These seasoned cultivators, whose cultivation bases and experience were both much more profound than the juniors', had known the answers all along, but they wanted the juniors to gain experience and grow from this exploration trip as much as possible.

Eyebrows furrowed, Gu Haofeng, Qian Xin, and Cao Qiushui pondered the matter in silence.

It wasn't long before Qian Xin from the Pill Pavilion Sect opened his mouth first. "The local Qi warriors we just killed were all at the Heaven or Greater Heaven stage. Not a single one of them had entered the Worldly realm. According to Dong Li and Qin Yan's judgment, the Phantasms are intentionally attracting people and spirit beasts to create more Specters.

"However, they also need to control the risks involved in such an undertaking. Since not a single Worldly realm expert has been lured to this place, it must mean that they think Worldly realm experts will pose a threat to them."

Shen Zhong nodded vigorously and said, "Well done. The way I see it, the few Phantasms that are hiding among those Specters possess fifth grade bloodline power, which means their strength is roughly equal to ours. Our appearance is just as troublesome for them as their appearance is for us."

Even though they had been slightly rattled at first, the moment

they had arrived in this place, Shen Zhong and the other experts with profound cultivation bases had examined the situation with their soul power.

The reason they were able to remain composed was that they had learned that the Phantasms they could detect weren't as formidable as they had imagined. They had a fair chance at defeating them.

The tip of Gu Haofeng's eyebrow rose as he suddenly said, "Well, all the local Qi warriors and spirit beasts seemed to have lost their minds after entering this area, and started killing each other. Why aren't we affected by whatever caused them to lose their minds?"

This was also what Nie Tian felt puzzled about.

Therefore, he also turned to look at Shen Zhong and Dong Mingxuan with a baffled expression on his face, hoping the two of them would explain it to them.

Dong Mingxuan smiled bitterly. "We can't see through that one either. It can either be because it takes time for the Phantasms' spells to work, or because they haven't cast their spells on you yet."

With a deep frown, Shen Zhong suddenly turned to Dong Mingxuan and Zhou Ruyun, who was from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, and said, "The Phantasms must be after something, gathering so many Specters. From the look of it, we can't possibly count on our juniors to kill those Phantasms with fifth grade bloodline power."

The powerful Worldly realm experts from the Realm of a Hundred Battles nodded together.

"Gu Haofeng!" Shen Zhong called out with a serious face. "How many thunderballs do you have left?"

"About two hundred," Gu Haofeng answered without any hesitation.

Shen Zhong nodded. “You’ve shouldered quite some weight for us during this trip. In a moment, the few of us will charge into the army of Specters and try to kill those Phantasms. I want you to kill as many Specters as you can with your thunderballs. Try your best to clear a path for us.”

“Happy to oblige!” Gu Haofeng said excitedly.

At that moment, Dong Mingxuan added, “If you can do that, that will be a first-class merit on your part!”

Upon hearing those words, Gu Haofeng and every other member of the Gu Clan seemed greatly spirited, their eyes lighting up.

“Let’s get started!” With that, Shen Zhong stamped the ground with great force. In the next moment, a terrifying gravitational field was born around him.

A very large, dark-yellow greatsword appeared in his hand.

Holding that sword, Shen Zhong leapt into the air and shot directly towards the misty, cyan phantasm Qi above the lake.

Dong Mingxuan, Qiu Liang, Zhou Ruyun, and Gu Han left right after him. They summoned their spiritual tools one after another and sped off like bolts of lightning.

The five of them were all at the Worldly realm. Normally speaking, they shouldn’t be able to soar through the sky.

However, as they arrived above the lake, they were able to float in the air before the army of Specters.

A strange buoyancy seemed to exist above the lake. It was due to that mysterious buoyancy that the Phantasm relic had been slowly rising from the bottom of the lake. Seeing that the juniors were all flabbergasted by the spectacular scene, Cao Qiushui explained, “As profound as our seniors’ cultivation bases are, they haven’t entered the Profound realm, so they shouldn’t have been able to fly through the sky.

“But they must have sensed the strange buoyancy above the lake, and known that it would allow them to float in the air. That’s why they dared to charge into that area.”

“So that’s how it is...” Dong Li said in a soft voice.

Chapter 420: Perilous Situation

Only after hearing Cao Qiushui's explanation did a enlightened expression appear on Nie Tian's face.

He was also shocked upon seeing the five Worldly realm experts charging right into the army of Specters in midair above the lake.

If weren't for Cao Qiushui's explanation, he would have thought that Dong Mingxuan and the others had suddenly entered the Profound realm.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Countless Specters let out sharp screeches as they pounced at the five Worldly realm experts, giving rise to loud whistling sounds.

The Phantasms' vague shapes flashed about every now and then within the sea of Specters. Although Nie Tian couldn't get a clear view of them, they seemed to have joined the battle as well.

"Gu Haofeng! Kill these Specters with your thunderballs!" Shen Zhong's voice echoed out from within the army of Specters.

The might of the gravitational field around him boomed. Even though the whistling Specters were in an intangible form, they still seemed to be affected by the gravitational field, and fell into the lake one after another.

As a large number of Specters fell from midair, one of the Phantasms finally showed itself.

Wreathed by rich, cyan phantasm Qi, the Phantasm was dressed in a dark-cyan robe, which was covered in numerous detailed, mysterious patterns.

It was a male with a handsome appearance and long, straight hair. He had eyes that looked like a pair of green jades, which were so deep that they seemed to hide countless secrets, like the unfathomable lake underneath him.

At this moment, a cold, gruesome smile could be seen at the corner of his mouth. There seemed to be a prismatic crystal in between his eyebrows, which looked very much like a third eye.

He could have wreathed himself in the rich phantasm Qi, yet he intentionally scattered the phantasm Qi veiling his face.

After a soft laugh, he said to Shen Zhong in perfect human language, “Worldly realm human Qi warrior. You seem to be stronger than the two humans I encountered in the Realm of Split Void who had the same cultivation bases as yours. Supposedly, Worldly realm humans are equally as strong as those of us with fifth grade bloodline power. I hope you can live up to that promise.”

With these words, the prismatic crystal between his eyebrows suddenly shone with a bright, cyan light.

It was as if that crystal had become a third eye that snapped open at that moment.

As it did, Shen Zhong’s expression flickered. He let out a muffled groan, as if he had taken a heavy blow to the chest.

In the meantime, very strong soul fluctuations were born in midair above the lake, and the rich phantasm Qi grew increasingly torrential.

Upon hearing the Phantasm’s words, a shudder ran through Nie Tian’s body, and he immediately confirmed his speculation. “It’s him!”

It was none other than the first Phantasm that had descended upon the Realm of Split Void in a meteor!

Back in the Realm of Split Void, since he had been surrounded by rich phantasm Qi, Nie Tian hadn’t been able to see his face at all. He had only been able to see him as a vague shape and hear his voice.

Now, facing Shen Zhong, he finally emerged from his army of

Specters and unveiled his face.

Upon seeing the Phantasm's face, Dong Li immediately turned to ask Nie Tian in a low voice, "Is that the Phantasm you saw in the Realm of Split Void?"

The Phantasm said himself that Shen Zhong was stronger than the two Worldly realm Qi warriors he had encountered in the Realm of Split Void.

Therefore, his identity went without saying.

"Yeah, that's the first Phantasm that appeared in the Realm of Split Void." Then, Nie Tian lowered his voice and added, "Two Worldly realm experts from the Wild Fire and Li Langfeng teamed up on him, yet they didn't seem to be able to defeat it."

Dong Li snorted disdainfully, saying, "Those from the Wild Fire are undoubtedly no match for Senior Shen. As for that Li Langfeng, as powerful as he was, he had just entered the Worldly realm back then. This Phantasm possesses fifth grade bloodline power. According to the ancient records I've seen, his strength should be at the same level as a Worldly realm human expert. He's not that formidable. I believe that Senior Shen will be able to handle him."

"I hope you're right," Nie Tian said.

At that moment, hearing Shen Zhong's explosive shout, Gu Haofeng cast out dozens of thunderballs towards the army of Specters above the lake.

However, each and every thunderball exploded soon after leaving Gu Haofeng's hand. None of them made it to the area above the lake.

In midair, the explosions gave rise to a sea of flashing lightning and rolling thunder, causing Heaven and Earth to shake violently.

Unfortunately, the raging lightning and thunder were still a significant distance from the Specters swarming above the lake.

“What’s going on?” Dong Mingxuan called out, surrounded by numerous Specters.

The others also shot their gazes towards Gu Haofeng.

Gu Haofeng’s expression grew grim. “My attack is being influenced by some kind of outside force.”

As soon as he infused his thunderballs with wisps of his psychic awareness and cast them into the air, he felt that the psychic connection between him and his thunderballs was instantly severed.

As that happened, his thunderballs escaped his control and exploded prematurely.

With a stern expression on her face, Qin Yan hastily reminded Gu Haofeng, “The Phantasms are one of the few outsider species that are extremely skilled at using psychic and soul magics. Let’s get closer to the lake. All eyes on him, everyone. We need to protect him!”

“Alright!” The crowd of juniors realized that this was a critical moment. Even though some of them weren’t fond of Gu Haofeng, they knew that his thunderballs were the Specters’ worst enemy, and that they had to make sure that his thunderballs hit where the Specters were most densely packed. Only in this way would they be able to clear a path for the Worldly realm experts and let them focus on the Phantasms.

The crowd of juniors, including Nie Tian, formed a circle around Gu Haofeng and prepared for engagement.

“Haofeng!” Cao Qiushui called out. “The number of the thunderballs you have is limited. Don’t cast too many out in one attempt. Take your time with them! Next time, you can try with one thunderball, and see if you can hit those Specters with it!”

“Sure!” Gu Haofeng nodded as he shot another thunderball towards the swarming Specters above the lake.

This time, he was obviously more cautious than before. He infused the thunderball with both his spiritual power and psychic power.

The thunderball sailed through the air like a bolt of lightning.

However, a mishap occurred again.

The moment his thunderball flew above the lake, Gu Haofeng lost connection with the wisp of psychic awareness he had vested the thunderball.

BOOOOOOM!

The thunderball exploded prematurely again, giving rise to sputtering lightning and rolling thunder.

Not only that, but an ice-cold aura traced back to his soul like a blade made from ice.

With a muffled groan, Gu Haofeng dropped to the ground. Face ghastly, he said, "The Phantasms' soul power reigns over the area above the lake! My thunderballs can't pass through the field of the Phantasms' soul power and fly to the center of the lake where the Specters are gathered."

Upon hearing those words, everyone felt a sense of urgency as they wracked their heads for methods to cope with it.

With a calm expression, Nie Tian gazed off at the swarm of Specters gathered in midair at the center of the lake, as well as the Worldly realm experts who were currently engaged in fierce battles with the Phantasms.

Even though he didn't unleash his Heaven Eyes, he was able to tell that there were a total of four Phantasms in the swarm of Specters.

Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and Zhou Ruyun, who were all at the middle Worldly realm, were dealing with one Phantasm each.

Considering Qiu Liang from the Pill Pavilion Sect and Gu Han

from the Gu Clan were at the early Worldly realm, the two of them were barely able to handle one Phantasm together.

The four Phantasms all possessed fifth grade bloodline power. The one Shen Zhong was fighting was the only one who had showed his face; the other three were all hiding behind dense, cyan phantasm Qi, their faces indistinguishable.

However, Nie Tian could vaguely see that the other three also had a prismatic crystal that looked like a third eye between their eyebrows.

The four Phantasms seemed to be handling the five Worldly realm experts from the Realm of a Hundred Battles with ease.

Part of the reason was that the four Phantasms were able to command their army of Specters to attack the five Worldly realm experts whenever they wanted.

Not only were the Specters hovering above the lake in great numbers, but some of them were also very powerful. Even Qiu Liang, who was a master of fire incantations, couldn't kill them quickly enough with his Blaze Pills.

The army of Specters was gradually weighing the Worldly realm experts down.

Meanwhile, the Phantasms didn't seem to be in a hurry to make moves at all. Their plan seemed to be to wait for the Specters to wear the human experts out and then kill them with one critical strike when they were at their weakest.

The crowd of youngsters watched the Specters, Phantasms, and their seniors fight in midair above the lake.

Even though Dong Li and the other Greater Heaven stage young leaders knew that the buoyancy over the lake would allow them to float in the air, none of them had the ability to arrive at the central area above the lake with a single leap.

Chapter 421: Wu Tian?

Seeing that rich phantasm Qi covered the surface of the cyan lake, the juniors didn't have the audacity to enter the lake water, fearing that something might happen to them if they did.

Therefore, even though they were burning with anxiety, they didn't know how to help their seniors, who were fighting in midair above the lake.

As they attempted to cast their spiritual tools into the area above the lake, they would be affected by the same soul power field that Gu Haofeng had.

Their spiritual tools that glittered with multi-colored light would sway soon after shooting into the air, and the juniors would have to retract them, their faces turning pale with fright.

Translucent and sparkling beads of sweat could be seen on Qin Yan's forehead as she said, "Those Specters are weighing our seniors down."

Her soul had also been invaded by a frosty aura when she had attempted to help Zhou Ruyun with her spiritual tool moments ago. Afterwards, she had been forced to retract her spiritual tool in a muddle.

She seemed to have sensed the unfavorable situation. "We can't simply stand here and do nothing. Gu Haofeng's thunderballs can deal massive damage to the Specters. As long as we can get his thunderballs to where the Specters are the most densely packed, we'll be able to greatly relieve our seniors' pressure. It's just that..."

"I'll give it a shot!" Dong Li blurted.

With these words, intense, dark spiritual power suddenly exploded from within her, who had been pondering silently this whole time.

In the next moment, a dark beast spirit flew out from the top of her head and rapidly morphed into the black phoenix in midair behind her.

She reached out with one hand and demanded, “Give me the thunderballs!”

The enormous, black phoenix fluttered its wide wings as if it was ready to take off, giving Dong Li, who was standing in front of it, a dangerous yet gorgeous look.

Looking at her, Gu Haofeng was bewildered for a moment, but he quickly snapped out of his daze, hastily stuffed some thunderballs into a leather pouch, and handed it to her. “Umm.. be careful. The area above the lake is covered in some sort of mysterious soul power. Even though you can sail through the air temporarily with the help of your black phoenix, you have to be extra careful!” He sounded very sincere.

“I will!” Growing impatient, Dong Li grabbed the leather pouch with a swift move before communicating with the black phoenix.

The spirit-form black phoenix spread its long, feathered, black wings.

Dong Li’s bright eyes glittered with a devilish light as she summoned her dark spiritual power and opened her own arms.

A mysterious connection seemed to suddenly be established between her body and the black phoenix’s, vesting her with the short-term ability to soar through the sky even though she was only at the early Greater Heaven stage.

With a vigorous flutter of its wings, the black phoenix seemed to bring Dong Li into the air. The scene was stunning when her curvaceous body was put together with the beautiful black phoenix. It was as if the two of them were dancing in midair, perfectly synchronized.

Bedazzled expressions appeared on the faces of Gu Haofeng and

many other young male Qi warriors as they watched her from the lakeside.

Soon, Dong Li and her black phoenix flew to the center of the lake.

“Be careful, Miss!” Han Mu reminded her in a loud voice from the lakeside, fearing that she would be attacked by the bizarre soul power.

At that moment, the five Worldly realm human experts were engaged in fierce battles with the Phantasms and their army of Specters, so they could no longer spare their attention to keep a close watch on what was happening in the vicinity.

Therefore, Nie Tian formed and unleashed his seven Heaven Eyes.

The moment they appeared, Nie Tian’s perception multiplied.

With their help, he was able to detect even the slightest changes in the vicinity, including energy flows and odd auras in the air.

He immediately noticed that strange soul power fluctuations had appeared in midair the moment Dong Li flew to the center of the lake.

They were the same soul power fluctuations that had caused Gu Haofeng’s thunderballs to explode before reaching the swarming Specters, and that had stopped the other juniors’ spiritual tools from flying to the center of the lake.

To his surprise, the strange soul power fluctuations didn’t come from the four Phantasms, but rather from the cyan lake underneath!

With one of his Heaven Eyes, Nie Tian conducted a more thorough scan and discovered that the soul power fluctuations were actually coming from under the lake’s surface.

“The Phantasm relic!” A shudder ran through Nie Tian’s body as

he figured out the truth.

It was neither the Phantasms nor the lake water that were causing the anomaly. Instead, it was the relic that had been slowly floating up from the bottom of the lake.

As soon as the soul power fluctuations appeared, a mysterious soul power field once again appeared, enveloping a half-sphere area over the lake.

Shen Zhong and the other Worldly realm experts, whose psychic power had transcended into soul power, didn't seem to be affected by the soul power field at all.

However, Dong Li, who had just flown to the center of the lake with the help of her black phoenix, shuddered violently.

A frosty soul power fluctuation ran straight into her soul without encountering any obstacles.

Since she hadn't entered the Worldly realm, the defenses she had formed around her soul were only made of psychic power. Facing the more advanced soul power, she was instantly bewildered.

Endless illusions appeared in her mind, making her feel as if she were surrounded by mountains of corpses and engulfed by seas of blood. She could almost taste the blood in her mouth.

“Kill them! Kill them all!” An uncontrollable thirst for blood was suddenly born in her mind. Her originally clear eyes suddenly turned red, as if they had been painted with blood.

The black phoenix let out sharp screams as it hastily flew back towards the lakeside with her.

However, at that moment, Dong Li seemed to be bewitched by the endless illusions in her head. Some sort of change seemed to be taking place in her mind.

WHOOSH!

The black phoenix flew down from the sky and landed right next

to Han Mu.

Blood-colored and cyan light could be seen in the depths of Dong Li's pupils as she stood still on the ground. Intense killing intent seemed to be rapidly brewing in her heart, and soon she would need a vent.

Cao Qiushui's face turned pale with fright. "S-she seems to be in the same state as the local Qi warriors who had lost their senses!"

Subconsciously, he took a step backwards and readied his spiritual tool towards Dong Li.

Upon hearing those words, everyone's expressions flickered as they saw what had gone wrong with her.

At that moment, Dong Li was indeed in a very similar state as the local Qi warriors they had killed not long ago.

Those people hadn't even been able to recognize their own friends and family after being influenced by what seemed to be the Phantasms' evil spell. The only thing in their minds had been killing everyone in sight.

"I'll strike down whoever dares to make a move against our Miss!" Expression flickering, Han Mu hastily gathered the other Dong Clan members to form a circle around Dong Li.

His gaze switched back and forth between Cao Qiushui and the others, enmity filling his eyes.

Cao Qiushui and Qian Xin fell silent as they stepped backwards, putting a significant distance between them and Dong Li.

With a concerned and agonized expression, Gu Haofeng called out repeatedly, "Dong Li! Wake up, Dong Li!..."

Mixed expressions flashed across Qin Yan's face, as if she were wrestling with dilemmas.

After a moment of pondering, she eventually stepped backward and said, looking in Han Mu's eyes, "I'm afraid that Dong Li has

been influenced by the Phantasms' magic. She might lose her senses shortly. If you're bent on protecting her, then... you should. Be careful though. I'm afraid that she'll soon start attacking you and your men."

Upon hearing her words, many Dong Clan members seemed to be suddenly enlightened.

One after another, their eyes started to flicker. On the one hand, they didn't want to abandon Dong Li; on the other, they were afraid that Dong Li would make them her first targets of attack after she turned.

Having fully refined her black phoenix beast spirit, Dong Li's battle prowess was very terrifying. If she really lost her senses and started attacking them, they wouldn't know if they would be able to survive.

Han Mu was the only one who stood loyally by her side, calling her name repeatedly, hoping that would wake her. At that moment, the black phoenix that had taken her back also returned to her.

Moments later, dark spiritual power started to thrum within Dong Li's body, as if she were struggling to contend against the magic that was trying to seize her mind.

Sometimes, Dong Li's eyes would shine with strong killing intent, her gorgeous face filled with a thirst for blood.

At other times, she would hold her head in agony and cry out like a trapped beast, as if she were doing her utmost to break free from something.

"Nie... Wu Tian! Do something!!" Eyes wide, Han Mu stared at Nie Tian like a man at death's door turning to any doctor he could find. (See note 1) By now, he and Nie Tian were the only ones still by her side.

Even the other Dong Clan members had stepped back uneasily to

keep at least a ten meter distance from her.

Desperate, Han Mu placed all of his hopes in Nie Tian, hoping that he would be able to help Dong Li pull through.

“Wu Tian?!” Shock filled Qian Xin and Cao Qiushui’s faces, as they didn’t understand why Han Mu would plead to a Heaven stage person at such a critical moment.

“What can he do to help?!” Gu Haofeng called out angrily.

Note:

1. 病急乱投医 (bìng jí luàn tóu yī) is the idiom the author has used here. It’s very commonly-used in everyday life. Meaning: (lit.) to turn to any doctor one can find when critically ill; (fig.) to try anyone or anything in a crisis.

Chapter 422: Mountains of Corpses and Seas of Blood

A handful of loyal members of the Gu Clan held Gu Haofeng back from getting close to Dong Li with full force.

Having spent quite some energy attacking Specters and having suffered a blow to his soul, his strength had taken a significant dip. Even though he roared angrily, he failed to struggle free from his subordinates.

“Wu Tian...”

Qin Yan from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce was the only one who knew Nie Tian’s actual identity other than Han Mu and the unconscious Dong Li.

Upon hearing Han Mu’s emotional plea, the tips of her eyebrows rose as she called out to Nie Tian, “If it’s possible, please try to help Li.”

At that moment, hearing her saying those words to Nie Tian with a pleading tone, all the others were shocked into a daze.

They didn’t understand why Qin Yan and Han Mu would beg for Nie Tian’s help.

No matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t picture Nie Tian, who possessed the lowest cultivation base and had kept a low profile so far, to be the one who would be able to save Dong Li at this critical moment.

However, it was none other than this young man who said, after hearing Han Mu and Qin Yan’s pleas, “Alright, I’ll try, but I can’t guarantee that it’ll work.”

Han Mu’s eyes instantly lit up.

Anticipation appeared in Qin Yan’s eyes as well.

The others, however, seemed rather confused as they looked blankly at the three of them.

Under everyone's gazes, Nie Tian reached out with one hand and pointed one finger in between her eyebrows. As he did, his seven Heaven Eyes that he had deployed in the vicinity rapidly flew back to him and followed that finger of his into Dong Li's soul.

A strong shudder ran through Nie Tian's body.

This being the first time his Heaven Eyes had ever entered another person's soul, he was flabbergasted by the scene in Dong Li's soul.

At this moment, Dong Li's soul sea looked like a misty sea of blood, in the middle of which were mountains of corpses that were unleashing endless negative auras.

It was said that only by entering the Worldly realm would Qi warriors be able to transform their psychic power into soul power and form their truesouls.

Entering the Worldly realm marked the transcendence of psychic power and the formation of truesouls.

However, since Dong Li was still at the Greater Heaven stage, her psychic power hadn't transcended and she hadn't formed her truesoul.

Hence, all of her memories, psychic power, and personal experiences were still in the form of a vague soul shadow that roamed within her soul sea.

At that moment, her soul shadow was surrounded by the mountains of corpses and seas of blood.

Her black phoenix was flying above her soul sea, letting out soundless cries, as if it were attempting to get Dong Li's soul shadow out of there.

However, the mountains of corpses and seas of blood seemed to

be creeping in odd ways, forming layers of illusions that served as multiple hemispherical shields over Dong Li's soul sea, stopping the black phoenix from getting close.

The moment Nie Tian's seven Heaven Eyes entered Dong Li's soul, they seemed to transform into seven fragmentary stars, and started shining over Dong Li's soul sea.

He was perfectly aware that they were not the actual fragmentary stars in his soul, and that the soul power within them was also very limited.

However, it seemed as if the moment they appeared over Dong Li's soul sea, they seemed to infuse Dong Li's soul with a breath of fresh air!

As the Heaven Eyes floated closer to the mountains of corpses and seas of blood under Nie Tian's command, endless bloody images and negative emotions swarmed in and started corroding them.

At that moment, the seven fragmentary stars in Nie Tian's soul instantly started to emanate dazzling starlight.

Incomparably pure soul power started flowing madly from Nie Tian's soul into Dong Li's soul.

Due to the transmission of soul power, the seven fragmentary stars in Nie Tian's soul gradually shrunk in size.

Meanwhile, the seven Heaven Eyes in Dong Li's soul started shining with increasingly brilliant starlight.

Starlight poured down on Dong Li's soul sea, like fierce sunlight shining on ice and snow.

Bathed in the starlight from the seven Heaven Eyes, the creeping mountains of corpses and seas of blood rapidly vaporized and disappeared.

Upon seeing the divine scene, the black phoenix warbled

cheerfully and excitedly.

As the corpses and blood gradually melted away, Dong Li's muffled soul shadow gradually recovered the ability to move.

WHOOSH!

Dong Li's soul shadow broke free from its restraints and rose up to reunite with the black phoenix.

Nie Tian's Heaven Eyes were still emanating bright starlight that seemed to be able to purge every bit of filth in this world. It wasn't long before the mountains of corpses and seas of blood vanished completely, along with all the illusions, leaving nothing but wisps of cyan smoke.

No one on the outside knew what was happening in Dong Li's soul. They stared blankly at Nie Tian and Dong Li, not understanding why he would point a finger in between Dong Li's eyebrows.

However, to their surprise, they soon noticed that the blood-colored and cyan light that had flashed across Dong Li's pupils every now and then gradually disappeared.

Meanwhile, Dong Li, who had seemed to be rather edgy and on the verge of losing her senses, slowly calmed down and closed her wide eyes.

Moments later, wisps of cyan smoke slowly flew out of the corners of Dong Li's closed eyes and dissipated into heaven and earth.

As soon as the mountains of corpses and seas of blood vanished, Nie Tian's seven Heaven Eyes returned to the seven fragmentary stars in his soul upon receiving his soul intent, along with the remaining soul power within them.

The fragmentary stars that had shrunk noticeably expanded again, though they weren't as large as they had been before.

Letting out a long breath, Nie Tian withdrew his hand, stepped to the side, and sat down. Only after a brief moment of recuperation did he turn to the bewildered Han Mu and say, “She should be fine now.”

Upon hearing these words, Han Mu was so flabbergasted that he even forgot to give a response.

When Dong Li had returned in a unconscious state, he had turned to Nie Tian, who was the closest to him, without much thought.

He actually hadn’t had high hopes that Dong Li could be saved, and he hadn’t had faith that Nie Tian would be able to reverse the changes taking place inside Dong Li.

However, as he looked at Dong Li now, the spiritual power fluctuations on her seemed normal, and he could no longer feel any threat from her.

All the signs indicated that the Dong Li he knew had been saved.

While he wandered in his thoughts, Dong Li’s voice suddenly rang out, “I’m okay now.”

Her eyes slowly opened.

After opening her eyes, she looked at no one but Nie Tian, who was sitting quietly beside her, with an extremely complicated expression on her face. Her mind seemed to drift away.

“Li!? A-are you alright?” Qin Yan probed.

Dong Li withdrew her gaze from Nie Tian’s face, shook her head, and said, “I’m alright.”

“Are you sure?” Qin Yan asked.

“Yeah.” Dong Li suddenly burst into a flaming rage as she turned to glare at Qian Xin and Cao Qiushui, asking, “You wanted to kill me just now, didn’t you?”

Qian Xin and Cao Qiushui looked deeply embarrassed, not daring

to say a word.

Dong Li turned to stare at the other Dong Clan members. “And you! You bore the same thought, right?”

In fear and trepidation, the Dong Clan members knelt and looked down at the ground, not daring to meet her eyes. “How do we dare, Miss!?”

“We were just afraid that you might... But we would never dare to make any move against you!”

“Please forgive us, Miss!”

With a cold expression on her face, she stared down at them. However, she suddenly felt exhausted, so with a wave of her hand, she said, “...Forget it... but I won’t give you another chance.”

“Thank you, Miss! You’re so magnanimous!” They exclaimed simultaneously.

With a cold snort, Dong Li’s expression grew less intense as she said to Han Mu, who was standing beside her, “After this exploration trip is over, everyone in your clan will be welcome to move into the Dong Clan.”

“I can never thank you enough, Miss!” Overjoyed, Han Mu dropped his knees on the ground and kowtowed to Dong Li. “But Miss, I’m not the one who saved you.”

“I know.” As she spoke, her gaze landed on Nie Tian.

Chapter 423: A Cluster of Memories

The moment Nie Tian's seven Heaven Eyes had entered her soul, she had recognized that it was him.

Back then, she had been confined by the mountains of corpses and seas of blood created by the Phantasms' magics. Trapped in endless illusions, she had been at the most desperate moment of her life.

Even her black phoenix had failed to burst through the barriers of illusions and rescue her soul shadow after she called upon it.

Drowned by surging waves of negative emotions, she had felt bleak and terrified.

She had thought that her soul shadow was going to be gnawed away. She would have become a bloodthirsty, empty shell like the local Qi warriors, and eventually become another Specter added to the army of Specters over the lake.

As a matter of fact, there had been nothing she could do to turn the situation around.

Occasionally, she had gathered all of her psychic power to restore a moment of clarity to her mind. However, what she had seen was Cao Qiushui, Qian Xin, and the others pointing their swords at her.

The way they had looked at her was as if they had been looking at a Specter, which had made her deeply disheartened.

Even though her subordinates had gathered around her, every one of them, except Han Mu, had guarded themselves against her, as if they had been facing a formidable foe.

Upon seeing such a scene, every bit of courage she had left to fight the evil in her mind had been extinguished.

Just as she had been on the verge of giving up, seven spots of bright starlight had suddenly appeared over her soul sea.

They had carried Nie Tian's soul aura, and their divine light instantly lit up her cold, fearful soul.

Nie Tian's appearance had given her hope again. She had braced herself and gone all-out to fight the mountains of corpses and seas of blood that had been eating her sanity away.

Eventually, the seven bright spots had shone with a dazzling light that could purge every bit of filth in this world, and eliminated every last bit of the illusions that had been afflicting her.

She had been saved.

Therefore, she knew better than anyone what Nie Tian had done for her, and her feelings about it were the most heartfelt.

As she looked at Nie Tian after recovering a clear mind, her state of mind was different from before.

"I can't believe that this guy is the one who pulled me out and saved me from the Phantasms' magics when I had lost all hope..." Dong Li thought to herself with an incomparably complicated expression on her face, as if she had forgotten the situation they were in.

Nie Tian, on the other hand, was still sitting with his eyes closed. Since he had consumed a large amount of soul power, he was focused on recuperating, and ignored her gaze.

Seeing that Dong Li had recovered a sound mind, Cao Qiushui and Qian Xin smiled wordlessly, looking rather shamefaced.

Meanwhile, their gazes followed Dong Li's to Nie Tian as they discussed among themselves.

"It's simply unbelievable that this man somehow brought Dong Li back from the verge of losing her senses. He's only at the Heaven stage. What in the world made him capable of doing that?"

"Why did Han Mu and Qin Yan turn to him instead of anyone else at that critical moment?"

“Who is he exactly?”

Deeply amazed, Cao Qiushui and Qian Xin also wracked their minds for answers.

Gu Haofeng finally struggled free from his subordinates. He scooted over to her and said, “I’m glad that you’re fine.”

At that moment, Qin Yan also walked to her side. “Li,” she said, “I hope you won’t hate us. No one knew what you would do once you lost your senses. It’s great that you’re okay now. I think it’s better that you let bygones be bygones. We still need to work together to figure out a way to turn the situation around.”

Considering that she had also pleaded for Nie Tian to help her, Dong Li nodded at her with a fairly pleasant expression on her face and said, “It’s just that I didn’t expect they would do this... But don’t worry. I’m fine. I know what’s at stake here.”

With a sigh, Qin Yan looked off at the battles taking place above the lake and said to Dong Li, “I knew you would be able to make quick adjustments. Their situation is getting more and more unfavorable. Those four Phantasms are wearing our seniors down with their army of Specters, and the four of them haven’t gone all-out yet.

“Uncle Dong must have noticed when you fell unconscious and were carried back by your black phoenix, yet he didn’t rush back here at the first possible moment, which means he is most likely trapped and can’t free his hands to help you.

“If this goes on, they’ll soon run out of spiritual power dealing with the Specters, and the Phantasms will be able to kill them without breaking a sweat.

“Not only that, but they’re Worldly realm experts. Once they die, and their discarnate souls transform into Specters, then...”

Qin Yan didn’t dare to finish.

However, upon hearing the consequences she had depicted for

them, everyone started to grow terrified and panicked.

Their expressions became increasingly anxious as they looked off into the distance, where their seniors were currently deeply besieged by Specters, as if they were afraid that they would be killed by those Phantasms, transform into Specters, and turn on them in the next moment.

At that very moment, Nie Tian suddenly felt that the second fragmentary star mark on his chest had become scalding hot.

Since he hadn't refined the second fragmentary star mark, it hadn't merged with his flesh and blood. Instead, it was like a tattoo branded on his chest.

Something within it seemed to have been triggered when Nie Tian's Heaven Eyes had flown into Dong Li's soul and purged the mountains of corpses and seas of blood with glorious starlight.

Sensing the anomaly, Nie Tian sent a mixture of his psychic power and soul power from the fragmentary stars into that mark.

As soon as it entered, a cluster of memories that looked like a small ball of light merged with it.

A profound description regarding the Phantasms, which seemed to be relevant to what they were facing, was instantly imprinted in his soul and became a part of his own memory.

PLOP! PLOP! PLOP!

As time passed, a part of the Phantasm relic finally rose above the lake's surface.

Even so, it still looked like an iceberg that had just unveiled its tip.

With a single glance at it, Nie Tian matched this so-called Phantasm relic with the secret regarding the Phantasms he had just acquired.

"This is...!" A shudder ran through his body.

The Phantasm relic that had risen above the lake's surface was a hundred-meter long, pyramid-shaped object. It seemed to be forged out of pure cyan iron that glittered with an ice-cold, metallic luster.

Numerous large cyan needles stuck out of its surface, their tips facing every direction.

Each and every needle was engraved with detailed and beautiful patterns, their sharp tips shining with cold light.

The rising Phantasm relic at the center of the lake also caught Dong Li and the others' attention. They all exclaimed in surprise, and hastily turned to Cao Qiushui.

Cao Qiushui's expression looked grim as he said, "Yeah, that's the Phantasm relic I discovered!"

"An ancient starship!" Nie Tian's eyes lit up as he turned to Dong Li and Qin Yan beside him and said, "That's one of the Phantasms' ancient starships! A Spirit Pearl is needed to start it. In order for their Spirit Pearl to work, a large amount of Specters are needed.

"The reason why those Phantasms have intentionally attracted so many local Qi warriors and spirit beasts to this place is that they need the Specters that they transform into after their deaths.

"Only when their Spirit Pearl has absorbed enough Specters will they be able to start that ancient starship, steer it out of the Realm of Dark Underworld, and embark upon a journey across the starry river."

As soon as he matched his newly-acquired knowledge regarding the Phantasms with the "Phantasm relic" before him, Nie Tian realized what was happening.

Upon hearing Nie Tian's explanation as to what that magnificent object really was, both Dong Li and Qin Yan's faces turned pale with fright. "One of the Phantasms' ancient starships?!"

This so-called ancient starship was by nature a gigantic

transportation vehicle that would allow its users to sail across the starry river.

It was a brilliant creation that only the truly advanced and powerful beings with high intelligence and advanced technology would be able to create.

The Phantasms were indeed one of the most powerful and advanced species in this vast starry river.

Every ancient and powerful species would need this sort of advanced vehicle, which could carry numerous lives to any remote corner of the starry river and explore its profound mysteries.

People said that it required an endless amount of resources to build this sort of starship.

It was said that, thousands of years ago, powerful experts from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace had come from a remote location in the starry river on similar starships.

However, even though there were countless Qi warrior sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars, none of them possessed enough information and resources to build this kind of starship.

Their explorations of the outside world were limited to the exploration of other domains through spatial rifts that occasionally appeared in their realms, which was very passive and inefficient.

However, this was their only option.

Chapter 424: The Good Old Days

Infinite danger lurked in the depths of the starry river.

In order for a human Qi warrior to travel across the starry river relatively safely, one had to be at the Void domain at least.

However, even Void domain human experts wouldn't be expected to survive long-term travel in the boundless starry river, and that was on the premise that they didn't run into any serious threats.

Once they did, it would probably result in their imminent deaths.

However, up to this day, there hadn't been a single person throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars who had stepped into the Void domain.

The moment the Phantasm's ancient starship appeared and Nie Tian explained what it was to them, both Dong Li and Qin Yan felt not only very excited, but also insecure and uneasy.

They both understood what the appearance of an ancient starship, which could allow its user to travel across the starry river, in this place meant to the Domain of the Falling Stars.

They didn't dare to imagine where this Phantasms' ancient starship would travel to.

Would it travel to some remote domain and then ship an army of formidable Phantasms back to the Domain of the Falling Stars, thus dooming every man and woman here?

"A-are you sure that's one of the Phantasms' ancient starships!?" Qin Yan's lips trembled as she spoke.

Apparently, she was quite shaken by the ancient starship's appearance.

"Absolutely!" Nie Tian blurted.

With a deep breath, Qin Yan turned to Cao Qiushui, Qian Xin,

and the others who weren't aware of the situation, and said, "That is no Phantasm relic, but rather one of the Phantasms' ancient starships! It's this ancient starship that has been gathering discarnate souls and Specters. After the Spirit Pearl in it absorbs enough of them, it will be able to restart this ancient starship!"

After she explained Nie Tian's speculations to everyone in a loud voice, everyone seemed deeply shaken. Some were thrilled, while others were fearful and anxious.

"What?! One of the Phantasms' ancient starships!?"

"Oh man...!"

"How is one of the Phantasms' ancient starships here in the Domain of the Falling Stars!?"

"What the hell does this mean!?"

...

Qian Xin's eyes grew wide and glittered with the light of greed as she said, "If we can get this ancient starship back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles..."

Upon hearing these words, Cao Qiushui and Gu Haofeng's eyes were also gradually filled with pure desire, and they couldn't seem to be able remove their gazes from the ancient starship anymore.

Any Qi warrior sect or clan in the Domain of the Falling Stars that could get this sort of ancient starship would instantly possess the ability to explore the starry river actively.

Endless mysteries were hidden in the depths of the infinite starry river.

What if they could come to find essential materials for Qi warriors to build their inner domains and advance into the Void domain, or discover brand-new domains, or get in touch with other Qi warrior sects that were much older and more powerful...?

With such thoughts on their minds, Cao Qiushui and the others

felt an upsurge of emotion, as if they could see their own clans rising to prominence.

“What are you so thrilled about?!” Qin Yan couldn’t help but dampen their enthusiasm. “If we can’t finish off those four Phantasms, whatever you’re picturing in your heads will have no meaning! Once our seniors die, do you really think, with just the few of us, we’ll be able to get that ancient starship back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles?”

“Quit your daydreaming! Be realistic and think about how we can help our seniors! Otherwise, they’ll soon be worn down by those Specters!”

Upon hearing her words, the crowd of juniors instantly snapped back to reality.

The enthused crowd quickly calmed down and stared silently at the area above the center of the lake, wracking their minds for a solution.

Gu Haofeng’s attempt had turned out fruitless. Dong Li had almost been possessed by some magic in her attempt to fly to the center of the lake. How on earth would they be able to get Gu Haofeng’s thunderballs to where the Specters were the most densely packed and help relieve their seniors’ burden?

At that moment, Nie Tian, who had been recuperating in silence, sprang to his feet.

His sudden action caught both Dong Li and Qin Yan’s gazes.

“W-what are you doing?” Dong Li was surprised.

“Can you summon your black phoenix again and take me to the center of the lake?” Nie Tian asked with a serious expression on his face.

Dong Li didn’t answer him right away, but rather narrowed her eyes, as if she were communicating with the beast spirit inside of her.

A few seconds later, she nodded and said, “I suppose I can.”

“Let’s try again,” Nie Tian proposed. “Take me with you this time.”

Dong Li’s eyes grew even wider. “But some strange power covers the area above the lake. I’m afraid...”

“I know,” Nie Tian interrupted her. “The soul power fluctuations are coming from the ancient starship, not any of those Phantasms. I’ll think of a way to neutralize the fluctuations. Don’t you worry about that. You just need to focus on casting those thunderballs where the Specters are the most densely packed.”

“Are you sure that you’ll be able to defend your soul against those strange fluctuations?” Dong Li asked, deeply concerned.

“I can’t say that I’m one hundred percent sure, but I want to give it a shot. So... what do you say? Are you in or not?” Nie Tian asked.

“Of course I am!” Dong Li said with decisiveness that could sever nails and chop iron.

Her conversation with Nie Tian attracted everyone’s attention. Cao Qiushui, Qian Xin, and the others all cast their gazes towards them.

Qin Yan’s eyes shone with the light of astonishment as she said, “If you want to do this, you need to keep your guard up at all times!”

Nie Tian turned to look at Gu Haofeng and said, “Will you please give us your remaining thunderballs, Young Master Gu? Since nobody can think of a solution, let Dong Li and I try again. To be honest, I don’t have full confidence that we’ll be able to return safely. This will be the only chance we’ve got. If our plan works, we’ll be able to deal great damage to the Specters. If it doesn’t, we might have to wait for death.”

“Why should I trust you?” Gu Haofeng asked with an unpleasant expression.

Dong Li flashed into action and stopped before him. She reached out with one hand. “Give them, Gu Haofeng! All of them!”

“I...” Gu Haofeng said, sulking.

Almost everyone started urging Gu Haofeng to hand out his thunderballs.

“Give them to her!”

“Just give them to her, will you?”

“Grant her this one chance, Haofeng!”

“There’s no time to hesitate!”

Even though Gu Haofeng was very reluctant, since this was everyone’s demand, he had no choice but to hand all of his remaining thunderballs to Dong Li. Then, he said to her in a low voice, “Li, it’s not that I don’t want to give them to you. I-I’m worried about you. I don’t trust that guy. I’m afraid that...”

“Thank you for being so concerned for my well-being,” Dong Li said with a sarcastic tone. “But what did you do to help me other than calling my name when I suffered from the Phantasms’ soul magics? You say you don’t trust that guy, but that guy helped me come out of that crisis alive. If I can’t trust him, who else can I trust?”

With these words, Dong Li ripped the leather pouch filled with thunderballs out of his hand and walked straight back towards Nie Tian, not sparing him another glance.

After hearing Dong Li’s hardhearted words, and watching her turn around and walk away determinedly, Gu Haofeng was both shamefaced and furious.

Dong Li walked back to Nie Tian’s side. With an unprecedentedly soft and natural tone, she said, “I’m ready to summon my black phoenix. You can prepare yourself now.”

An uncomfortable expression appeared on Nie Tian’s face.

“Okay.”

He had never seen Dong Li so gentle before. He needed some time to get used to it.

Even Dong Li seemed to be shocked by her own uncommonly gentle tone. Her cheeks reddened slightly. Looking somewhat embarrassed, she suddenly grew angry for no apparent reason. “You behave yourself when we’re in the air!”

Nie Tian was stunned, not knowing what she meant.

WHOOSH!

At that moment, Dong Li suddenly started to thrum with dark spiritual power.

A wisp of a beast spirit once again flew out from the top of her head, rapidly morphing into a huge, black phoenix.

“Are you ready?” Dong Li asked loudly.

“I am!” Nie Tian replied.

In the next moment, Dong Li moved behind his back, where she extended her arms through the space under his arms and held him up.

A shudder ran through Nie Tian’s body.

He hadn’t expected that the way Dong Li was going to take him into the air was just by embracing him from behind.

In this intimate position, he couldn’t help but recall the time when he had locked down this very beautiful woman in the dense forest and taken advantage of her.

Immediately afterwards, he noticed that Gu Haofeng, who was now standing directly in front of them, was glowering at him, as if his eyes were about to spit fire.

Everyone else’s expressions, including Cao Qiushui’s, Qian Xin’s, and those of their subordinates, also grew strange as they looked at

the two of them in such a position.

Meanwhile, Qin Yan let out a low chuckle.

“Let’s go!” Dong Li’s voice rang out from beside his left ear, and then she carried him slowly into the air.

He looked down and noticed that the crowd of juniors was watching them fly further and further away.

In the meantime, Dong Li’s ample and soft chest was pressing against his back. A whiff of Dong Li’s natural scent suddenly made his mind wander...

“If you dare to think about the time when we were in the dense forest, I’ll drop you immediately!” With these words, the sounds of Dong Li gnashing her teeth came from behind him.

He hastily cleared his throat and said, “No, I’m not!”

Dong Li grew angry. “Then why did you clear your throat before you spoke?! I knew you were thinking about it!”

Nie Tian fell silent.

Since his position didn’t allow him to turn his head, he couldn’t see that, at this moment, Dong Li was unprecedentedly blushing with shyness.

As much as she didn’t want it to, their current position also jogged her memory about the things Nie Tian had done to her in the dense forest.

That was the most embarrassing and humiliating moment of her life.

Even now, the thought of it made her want to flay this guy she was holding alive. However, she now had no choice but to take him into the air in such an intimate position under the gazes of so many of her companions from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

She even didn’t dare to look down and see the looks on Qin Yan, Cao Qiushui, Gu Haofeng, and Qian Xin’s faces, and she didn’t dare

to imagine how they would regard her relationship with Nie Tian.

Chapter 425: It Worked!

As the two of them approached the area above the center of the lake, Nie Tian rapidly calmed himself and cast all irrelevant thoughts out of his mind.

He once again formed and unleashed his seven Heaven Eyes. Like invisible clusters of light and energy, they hovered around him and Dong Li.

He fixed his eyes on the lake underneath, as well as the Phantasms' ancient starship, as if he were waiting for soul power fluctuations to attack them.

Dong Li also tensed up, and was no longer in the mood to bicker with him about their history. She moved her mouth closer to Nie Tian's ear and said, "We're about to reach the center of the lake.

"I see," Nie Tian responded in a low voice.

On the lake shore, everyone from the Realm of a Hundred Battles was looking up at the two of them, their eyes shining with the light of hope.

They'd all tried to send their spiritual tools to the central area above the lake to kill Specters.

However, each and every one of them had failed.

They were well-aware that there was something abnormal about this lake. No matter whether it was spiritual tools or humans, as long as they got close enough to the central area, they would instantly suffer from overwhelming soul power attacks.

Considering their current cultivation bases and strength, none of them would be able to contend against them.

However, the fact that Nie Tian had successfully brought Dong Li back from the verge of losing her senses and becoming a Specter made them hold a smidgen of hope in their hearts.

Even though they didn't know Nie Tian's true strength, this strange young man with the most unimpressive cultivation base among them had become their only hope.

As they watched the black phoenix bring Dong Li and Nie Tian closer and closer to the center of the lake, they grew increasingly nervous.

Three meters, two meters, one meter.

WHOOSH!

The black phoenix suddenly accelerated and charged into the central area.

At that moment, the juniors from the Realm of a Hundred Battles noticed from the lakeside that a layer of cyan energy spread out like watery ripples and covered the part of the ancient starship that had risen above the lake's surface.

It was very similar to the cyan energy that had covered the smooth mountain walls upon a sharp screech as they had traveled through the valley.

They immediately realized that Nie Tian's speculation was correct. The strange soul power fluctuations hadn't been caused by the Phantasms, but rather that ancient starship.

The moment the cyan metallic surface of the ancient starship was covered in cyan, rippling energy, strange soul power fluctuations, which Nie Tian was able to perceive clearly, enveloped the entire lake.

An ice-cold, evil soul influence rushed up into the air and swallowed Dong Li and Nie Tian like the lake water that was being brought into the air by the ascension of the ancient starship.

Submerged by the inexplicable evil soul influence, Dong Li's face turned pale as she couldn't help but recall the bloody scene that had taken place within her soul not long ago.

The mountains of corpses and seas of blood brought by the evil soul influence seemed to be on the verge of drowning her again, and she would have to relive the infinite horror and desperation.

“N-nie Tian...” Terrified, Dong Li called out Nie Tian’s real name, as if only by doing this would she be able to relieve the intense fear she was experiencing.

However, Nie Tian didn’t answer her call.

Feeling insecure and uneasy, Dong Li tilted her head to look at him from behind.

BZZZ! BZZZ!

That was when she realized that odd sounds were being created around both Nie Tian and her.

As she glanced around, she discovered that starlight seemed to have suddenly filled the area around them, and started fighting the evil soul influence head-on, giving rise to odd sounds.

Being so close to them, she finally noticed the seven clusters of energy that were hovering around them, unleashing starlight and protecting her and Nie Tian from the evil soul influence.

Realizing what was happening, Dong Li calmed herself and, with a thought, instructed her black phoenix to fly even faster.

As her black phoenix’s sharp cry rang out in her mind, she could feel the distance between them and the center of the lake rapidly shortening.

She was aware that the black phoenix possessed a limited intelligence.

It was because of her previous failed attempt that the black phoenix had been restraining itself and saving its energy before reaching the center of the lake.

It was worried that Nie Tian would fail to ward off the evil soul influence from the ancient starship and protect Dong Li.

Therefore, it was ready to turn around and return to the lakeside at any moment.

Only when it realized that Dong Li was unharmed after they were over the lake water did it put its heart at ease.

Upon receiving Dong Li's command, it stopped reserving its strength and charged towards the center of the lake, where countless Specters were gathered, at full speed.

Being held by Dong Li from behind, faint sparks could be seen shining in the depths of Nie Tian's pupils.

Meanwhile, the seven fragmentary stars in his soul were also shining with dazzling light, transferring pure soul power into the seven Heaven Eyes hovering around them.

After receiving the supplement in soul power, the Heaven Eyes moved faster and faster in profound ways, forming a grand protective star formation around Nie Tian and Dong Li.

A wave of evil soul influence rushed out from the ancient starship underneath them and slammed into the star formation, which was only visible to Qi warriors at the Worldly realm or higher.

Qin Yan and the others who were standing by lakeside could only see sparks sputtering off them and wisps of cyan smoke rising around them.

Nie Tian unceasingly infused his Heaven Eyes with refined soul power from the fragmentary stars in his soul to ward off the evil soul influence that carried endless negative emotions.

As time passed, he gradually started to grimace, as it appeared that it was becoming more and more strenuous.

At that moment, another memory, which had previously been branded in the depths of his soul, began to grow clear.

From it, he instantly realized which part of the ancient starship

the raging soul power fluctuations were coming from: the Spirit Pearl!

The Spirit Pearl could be considered the soul of the ancient starship, and one of the Phantasms' most fascinating inventions.

Whether the ancient starship would be able to rise into the heavens and travel the depths of the boundless starry river depended on the number of Specters the Spirit Pearl could gather.

Only when the Spirit Pearl had gathered enough Specters would it be able to restart this ancient starship.

At this moment, the Spirit Pearl must have gathered quite a number of Specters already, since the evil soul influence it sent out was actually the endless grudges and negative emotions from the numerous deceased it had absorbed.

The Spirit Pearl was channeling the negative energy from the emotions the Specters had felt the moment they died, for example, fear, panic, desperation, insanity, killing intent and grudges. With these emotions, it formed a strong, evil soul influence and used it to poison the minds of the living.

These attacking waves, filled with the endless negative energy of the Specters, could easily devour a normal person and make him or her lose control.

Seeing that the seven fragmentary stars in his soul were becoming smaller and smaller, Nie Tian sensed the crisis. Therefore, he shouted, "Hurry, Dong Li! I won't be able to hold on for much longer!"

At that moment, with the black phoenix's help, they were only about ten meters away from the swarming Specters. They could see them flashing around at high speeds, attacking Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts.

Dong Li finally found a good opportunity.

She grabbed a handful of thunderballs from within the leather

pouch and cast them towards a location where the Specters were the most densely packed.

At that very moment, the Phantasm who had unveiled his face suddenly ended his battle against Shen Zhong and emerged from behind numerous Specters.

Without sparing Dong Li a single glance, he fixed his eyes on Nie Tian, brutality and violence filling his cyan pupils. “It’s you!?”

As soon as he left Shen Zhong, the burden on Shen Zhong’s shoulders was instantly lifted. Thus, he jerked his head around to gaze at Nie Tian and Dong Li.

“It’s Dong Li and that kid...” As Shen Zhong cast a secret spell, the gravitational field around him suddenly intensified, causing one Specter after another to fall from midair.

“Hurry!” Nie Qian urged Dong Li again in a loud voice.

Without any hesitation, Dong Li grabbed another handful of thunderballs from within the leather pouch and cast them towards another area where many Specters were packed.

RUUUUMBLE!

Mighty thunder and lightning power filled the air. This time, not a single thunderball exploded midway. Instead, each and every one of them found their enemies.

Countless lightning bolts and endless rolls of thunder exploded in the heart of the swarm of Specters.

It was a calamity for the Specters.

As soon as the densely-packed Specters were touched by the sky-filling lightning, they were immediately reduced to wisps of cyan smoke, which rapidly scattered and vanished.

With this single attack, Dong Li had wiped out hundreds of Specters.

With a tremendous lift in her spirits, Dong Li fetched more

thunderballs and cast them towards other areas where large numbers of Specters were swarming.

After obtaining a clear understanding of the situation, Shen Zhong called out loudly, “We need to intensify our offense! Never let the Phantasms find an opportunity to attack Dong Li!”

With these words, he charged directly towards the Phantasm with the unveiled face with a momentum as if he had no regard for his own life, hoping to stop him from interfering with Dong Li’s operation.

RUUUUMBLE! RUUUUUUUMMMMBLLLLLE!

Thunderballs continued to explode amidst the Specters. Substantial amounts of Specters were annihilated, leaving faint cyan smoke in the air.

In the meantime, Shen Zhong and the other Worldly realm experts struck the four Phantasms with everything within their power. The battle between them grew increasingly heated and fierce.

Whenever the Phantasms attempted to approach Dong Li and Nie Tian, they would always be intercepted by the human seniors in the most relentless ways.

“It worked!”

“Their plan actually worked!”

“The Specters are dying by the hundreds!”

Qin Yan and the others cheered by the lakeside, as if they had won a war.

Chapter 426: The Spirit Pearl

BLUB! BLUB! BLUB!

The starship, the majority of which was still underwater, suddenly emerged from under the lake's surface completely.

Under everyone's gaze, it slowly rose up into the air.

Meanwhile, a sphere glowing with cyan light suddenly shot out from among the numerous cyan, needle-like protrusions.

As soon as it appeared, all the Specters that hadn't been extinguished by the thunderballs converged madly on it like moths to a flame, as if they were irresistibly attracted to it.

In a split second, all of the remaining Specters floating in midair disappeared into the cyan light ball.

The Spirit Pearl!

With a single glance at it, Nie Tian realized that it was none other than the core and soul of that ancient starship, and also the key to restarting it.

The reason why the Spirit Pearl hadn't absorbed the large amount of Specters earlier was probably that it was waiting for them to build up.

The discarnate spirits of Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts would be more helpful to the Spirit Pearl than all the other Specters combined. Therefore, it seemed to be using those Specters to gain what was truly useful for it.

However, as Nie Tian and Dong Li came along and bombarded the Specters with thunderballs, the army of spirit-form Specters suffered great losses.

It was as if the Spirit Pearl knew that if it didn't absorb those Specters, it would end up losing more to the thunderballs.

Therefore, it had no choice but to separate itself from the ancient

starship and collect all the remaining Specters immediately.

In a brief moment, the army of Specters floating in midair above the ancient starship vanished completely.

Without the distraction of the numerous Specters, Shen Zhong and the other powerful experts were finally able to concentrate on dealing with their true opponents: the Phantasms.

After losing the Specters which they had been using as shields and distractions, even though the Phantasms were still moving about in the rich phantasm Qi, their movements became traceable.

“Brother Dong, who in the world is that Wu Tian?” asked Shen Zhong.

Relieved of a heavy burden, Shen Zhong continued to strengthen his gravitational field as he swung his greatsword and struck his Phantasm opponent with incomparable force.

As he brandished his giant sword, even the heavens seemed to sink. His grayish-yellow spiritual power seemed to suddenly morph into mountains that weighed down on everything around him.

While handling his fierce attacks, the Phantasm constantly shot glances at Nie Tian, his bizarre, cyan pupils shining with a strange light, as if his mind was seized by something else, instead of focusing on his battle against Shen Zhong.

Because of this, Shen Zhong could spare his attention to talk to Dong Mingxuan beside him and ask about Nie Tian.

“I don’t know either.” Dong Mingxuan found time to reply to him during his battle against another Phantasm. “But that can wait. We need to finish this first. We can’t allow these Phantasms to do whatever they want in the Domain of the Falling Stars!”

“You’re right!” Shen Zhong replied.

He no longer turned to look at Nie Tian and Dong Li, but rather

focused all of his energy on his opponent.

The other human experts also felt greatly relieved after the Specters were gone. Their tensed nerves were finally slightly soothed.

Meanwhile, the disappearance of the army of Specters made Dong Li lose all her targets. Holding more thunderballs in her hand, she paused in midair.

At this moment, even though every Worldly realm expert became less stressed thanks to the disappearance of the Specters, the pressure Nie Tian felt was multiplying by the second.

The moment the Specters disappeared into the Spirit Pearl, Nie Tian sensed that unprecedentedly strong soul power fluctuations had burst forth from within it, along with all kinds of negative emotions. Like endless waves, they repeatedly smashed into Nie Tian's defenses.

He suddenly realized that, after absorbing such a large number of Specters, the Spirit Pearl was able to mobilize more power, thus magnifying its might severalfold.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

The mysterious formation of Heaven Eyes around Nie Tian and Dong Li continued to take unceasing impacts from the evil soul influence.

As sparks sputtered and cyan smoke rose from the spherical shield around them, the seven fragmentary stars in Nie Tian's soul grew smaller and smaller, like a candle flickering in the wind that could go out at any moment.

Immediately afterwards, he realized that the power within those fragmentary stars was about to run out.

"Take me out of here!" He exclaimed.

Upon hearing these words, Dong Li saw blood flowing out of his

ears and became shocked.

What she didn't know was that, at this moment, blood had also started slowly flowing out of his mouth, eyes, and nose.

These were signs that his soul was on the verge of collapsing after taking numerous heavy blows.

For some reason, looking at Nie Tian in such a poor condition, Dong Li grew unprecedentedly panicked.

“Let's go!” She screamed like a mad person.

Her black phoenix immediately understood what she was thinking. Fluttering its incomparably wide wings, it took her and Nie Tian towards the lakeside where Qin Yan and the others were gathered.

“Don't die... Don't you dare die! You've got to hang on! Just hang on, you hear me?!”

She shouted continuously in Nie Tian's ears, as if she had no choice but to encourage Nie Tian with this powerless method.

She didn't know why she felt so much heartache and fear at this moment, but she knew that she was afraid of Nie Tian dying.

She had thought that she truly detested Nie Tian, and that she would be glad to see terrible things happen to him. She couldn't figure out why she was so worried about him now.

However, confused as she was, she knew that the only thing her heart wanted at this moment was for Nie Tian to survive.

Even if he had to die, she should be the one who killed him, not some Phantasm or anybody else.

WHOOSH!

While the two of them left the center of the lake at a high speed, the Spirit Pearl that had been floating right above the ancient starship suddenly shot towards them, rapidly shortening the distance between them.

It was as if only when the Spirit Pearl was close enough to them would it be able to launch its most mighty attacks.

Sensing the approaching sphere of glowing, cyan light, Dong Li grew increasingly anxious. However, there wasn't anything she could do to stop it.

Watching it gradually gaining on them, Dong Li cast a handful of thunderballs at it with great force, looking enraged.

The thunderballs exploded one after another.

However, the Spirit Pearl seemed to possess its own intelligence and spirit. It swiftly maneuvered about in the air and successfully dodged the series of explosions. Afterwards, it continued to chase after her and Nie Tian with unrelenting effort.

At the same time, a strong and strange attractive force was suddenly born within the Spirit Pearl.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Numerous wandering Specters charged through the wall of cyan light and out of the mountain valley. On the other side of the lake, the discarnate souls of dead spirit beasts also started flying toward the Spirit Pearl at full speed.

In no more than a few seconds, all of the misty, gray Specters and discarnate souls of the spirit beasts merged into Spirit Pearl.

As that happened, the cyan and profound light the Spirit Pearl emanated grew increasingly bright.

In the meantime, more blood flowed out of Nie Tian's nose, eyes, and ears.

Dong Li didn't need to be brilliant to see that as the Spirit Pearl absorbed every Specter it could find, the burden on Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other powerful experts was greatly relieved, yet all of their relieved pressure was now weighing on Nie Tian.

Nie Tian's breaths gradually grew weak, and he seemed to start having difficulty keeping his eyes open, as if his eyelids were now as heavy as hundreds of thousands of kilos.

Soon, he couldn't help but open and close his eyes repeatedly. Watching the approaching Spirit Pearl, he relied on his last remaining consciousness to brokenly say to Dong Li, "Take... Take me away from this place, as far away as possible. Hurry..."

He knew that Qin Yan and the others wouldn't be able to help him.

He also knew that, no matter whether or not he would eventually be able to fight off the Spirit Pearl, he shouldn't stop.

Perhaps, only when they were far enough away from the ancient starship would the Spirit Pearl give up chasing after him, turn back, and steer the ancient starship out of the Realm of Dark Underworld to some remote area in the starry river, where more powerful Phantasms were waiting.

He believed that the Spirit Pearl would eventually let him go and leave with the Phantasms' ancient starship.

"Alright! As you wish!" Dong Li said loudly.

Chapter 427: Earth-shaking, Mountain-shattering Changes

At this moment, Dong Li didn't hesitate in the slightest.

She no longer cared what Qin Yan and the others would think of her as she spurred her black phoenix on.

The moment that thought appeared in her mind, the black phoenix spread its wings to the fullest and took her and Nie Tian towards the direction where a large number of spirit beasts were still fighting fiercely.

This was mainly because both Dong Li and her black phoenix knew that a wall of cyan light, which even Shen Zhong hadn't been able to break, had already sealed the mouth of the mountain valley they had come from.

If they wanted to leave the lake area as quickly as possible, that was by no means a good choice.

Qin Yan and the other juniors stared up into the air from the lakeside. They were all confused, seeing the returning Dong Li suddenly circle around in the air and speed off towards the area where numerous spirit beasts were fighting each other to the death.

They had no idea what was happening.

Dong Mingxuan and the other powerful experts also noticed Dong Li and Nie Tian's abnormal movements, yet there was nothing they could do either.

After all, none of them were able to soar through the air under normal circumstances.

Dong Li was the only one who could.

With the black phoenix's help, Dong Li and Nie Tian shot towards the area where spirit beasts were madly killing each other.

Seeing that Nie Tian and Dong Li were flying farther and farther away from the ancient starship, the Spirit Pearl came to a stop in midair.

It seemed as if it were pondering whether it should keep chasing after Nie Tian or return to the ancient starship and steer it to its preset location.

However, it didn't halt for long.

In a few seconds, it seemed to have made its decision.

A strange surge of energy suddenly burst forth from within the bright cyan Spirit Pearl. Simultaneously, in the mountain valley not very far away, cyan energy once again spread out and covered the mountain walls.

At that moment, the rippling energy in the valley, the wall of cyan light sealing its mouth, and the cyan energy filling the lake rapidly condensed into pure energy that fused with the ancient starship, which was slowly rising into the air.

Chest-drumming rumbles echoed out from within the ancient starship.

The slowly-rising ancient starship started accelerating, aiming at the highest heavens.

Seeing their ancient starship rising higher and higher into the sky, all of the four Phantasms ended their battles against the human experts and flew onto it.

As Shen Zhong and the other human experts attempted to approach the ancient starship, they were all met with a strong counterforce, and fell towards the lake underneath.

Now devoid of some kind of energy, the originally cyan lake water grew incomparably clear, and not a single anomaly could be seen within it.

However, as the ancient starship received enormous amounts of

energy and sailed into the heavens, the Spirit Pearl didn't return to it.

It seemed to spend some time getting ahold of its bearings before flying after Nie Tian again.

Standing by lakeside, Cao Qiushui finally realized what was going on, and asked in a loud voice, "Why did Dong Li take Wu Tian and leave?"

Frustration appeared on Qin Yan's face as she said, "Perhaps she thought we wouldn't be able to help Wu Tian."

"That cyan ball of light went after them," Qian Xin said with a grim expression. "It must record the Phantasms' secrets! It is an item of great importance!"

"That Spirit Pearl?" Only after a moment of processing did Qin Yan realize what Qian Xian meant. With an unpleasant tone, she said, "If you want that Spirit Pearl so badly, you might as well chase after it. Since you're more resourceful than any of us, perhaps you'll be able to catch it and take it for your own."

Realizing that he had been seen through, Qian Xin said embarrassedly, "T-that's not what I meant."

Qin Yan let out a cold harrumph and didn't respond.

At that very moment, loud rumbles rang out from the valley they had come from, causing Heaven and Earth to shake violently.

They turned around and saw that the mountains on both sides of the valley were trembling nonstop, and rocks were falling everywhere.

Even the ground under their feet started to shake intensely.

After falling into the lake, Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other experts gazed helplessly up at the ancient starship as it charged into the highest heavens at a speed they couldn't even comprehend.

Then, they each found a floating log, stood on it, and then drove it towards the lakeside with their spiritual power.

However, they didn't head towards the area where Qin Yan and the other juniors were gathered, but instead in the direction Dong Li and Nie Tian had sped away.

Perhaps they were worried about Dong Li and Nie Tian, and wanted to give them a hand, or perhaps they placed their last hope on securing the mysterious Spirit Pearl now that the ancient starship had charged out of the Realm of Dark Underworld.

In any case, Qin Yan was certain that they were going in the same direction Nie Tian and Dong Li had left in.

However, even though they were at the Worldly realm, they weren't able to sail through the sky as Dong Li could with the help of her black phoenix.

That meant that even if they managed to chase them out of the lake area, it wouldn't be easy for them to catch up to Nie Tian and Dong Li, or the Spirit Pearl.

Meanwhile...

Watching the lake underneath them shrinking into a tiny spot, the four Phantasms on the ancient starship looked rather grim.

A Phantasm turned to look at the Phantasm who had unveiled his face, and said in fear and trepidation, "Lord Dialo, the Spirit Pearl... didn't return to our starship. What do we do?"

"Without it, can our starship still get to our preset destination?"

Dialo, who had previously been to the Realm of Split Void, pondered for a while before saying, "There's a strong tie between the Spirit Pearl and our starship. Once it has caught up to and killed that inheritor of the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace's legacies, it should be able to find its way back to us. There's no need to worry about it. It has already successfully restarted our starship, gathered our residual energy in the Realm of Dark

Underworld, and set a clear destination for us.

“All we need to do is wait for it to return.”

“But what if it doesn’t return?” The humble Phantasm asked. “What do we do then?”

“It will definitely return!” Dialo blurted with indisputable authority.

Thus, the other Phantasm didn’t dare to ask another question.

Soon afterwards, the ancient starship left the Realm of Dark Underworld and sailed into the depths of the starry river.

As it did, the four Phantasms went into the ancient starship.

...

In the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Next to the foot of an enormous volcano sat the Flame God Sect, one of the two most powerful Qi warrior sects in this realm. Crimson rocks piled into a forest of magnificent and splendid stone palaces.

Even though Tang Yang had failed to obtain a fragmentary star mark from Ning Yang’s hands during the Heaven Gate trial, he had returned to the Flame God Sect safely.

Two years afterwards, he had successfully advanced from the late Greater Heaven stage to the early Worldly realm.

During the past few months, many Heaven and Greater Heaven stage disciples of the Flame God Sect had gone out and never returned from their trips, with no apparent reason. It made Tang Yang rather uneasy.

He had communicated with people from the Spirit God Sect, since he had thought it was the Spirit God Sect that had sought trouble with them and thus secretly killed those missing disciples.

However, according to word he received from the Spirit God

Sect, the same thing had happened to them; many of their disciples had also gone missing. Furthermore, they hadn't been able to discover a single corpse.

Later, Tang Yang had learned that some of the other minor Qi warrior sects in the Realm of Dark Underworld had also lost contact with many of their disciples after they left the sect.

After learning of the situation, the sectmaster of the Flame God Sect had appointed him to get to the bottom of this matter. However, he hadn't found any clues yet.

Just as he was having a headache over this tough puzzle, he suddenly saw a human figure wreathed in blazing flames flying out of the mouth of the enormous volcano.

In the next moment, a thought shot directly into his mind. "I sensed Heaven-shaking, Earth-shattering turbulence from the mountainous regions in the south. I suspect that some changes have occurred there. I want you to go over there and take a look."

A shudder ran through Tang Yang's body as he got down with one knee and nodded. "Of course, sectmaster. I'll set out now."

"I suppose the sectmaster of the Spirit God Sect has also sensed the anomaly. Their people are probably heading there already. I want you to figure out what happened there, but don't get in any conflicts with people from the Spirit God Sect."

Tang Yang nodded again. "Got it!"

Afterwards, he rapidly assembled a team of Flame God Sect disciples and rushed towards the mountainous regions in the south on an air-transportation spiritual tool.

At the same time, another air-transportation spiritual tool filled with powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect sped towards the same location from another direction.

Their mutual destination was none other than the area where the explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles were gathered.

...

In a dense forest in the south of the Realm of Dark Underworld.

A giant, black spirit-form phoenix carried Dong Li and Nie Tian as they sped through the air over countless towering trees.

Thousands of meters behind them, the Spirit Pearl was flying as lightly as if it had no weight, quickly shortening the distance between them.

In the region the Spirit Pearl was flying through, numerous spirit beasts madly attacked each other, constantly creating new discarnate souls.

Like wisps of gray mist, the spirit beasts' discarnate souls disappeared into the Spirit Pearl one after another.

It was as if the reason why it wasn't traveling at full speed was that it wanted to collect more souls.

"Nie Tian!" Dong Li called out anxiously. "How are you doing, Nie Tian?"

At this moment, since they were already far out of Qin Yan and the others' sight, she, who used to be holding Nie Tian from behind in a stiffened position, no longer took positions into consideration and held him as close to herself as possible.

Hugging him from behind, she could see that the blood coming out of Nie Tian's ears had already painted her shoulder red.

She called Nie Tian's name over and over again, but Nie Tian didn't give any response.

Her heart gradually sank.

Chapter 428: Saving the Master

In the area where numerous spirit beasts were fighting each other to the death.

Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and the other Worldly realm experts followed the direction Dong Li and Nie Tian had left in and barged into the crowd of spirit beasts.

Upon seeing them, the senseless spirit beasts, which had been fighting each other, suddenly found new targets.

A large number of fourth grade spirit beasts and one fifth grade spirit beast rapidly converged on Shen Zhong and the others.

Even though the experts didn't want to be caught up in battles, they ended up spending quite some time and energy breaking out of the spirit beasts' siege.

After losing the spirit beasts, Dong Mingxuan was the first to come to a stop. After calming himself, he said, "Not all of us need to go after them. The earth and mountains were rocked violently due to the ancient starship bursting out of the lake. It must have attracted the Flame God Sect and the Spirit God Sect's attention.

"It goes without saying that they have people coming to examine that area. It's hard to say if those juniors will be able to handle it well. We'll need to spare people to return and take them back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles"

After a brief pondering, Shen Zhong realized that his prediction was well-based.

"How about this," He said, pointing at Qiu Liang and Gu Han. "Why don't you two take those juniors back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles as soon as possible?"

Qiu Liang nodded back at him without hesitation.

However, Gu Han seemed a bit hesitant as he said, "That sphere

of cyan light is of great importance. It might contain secrets regarding the Phantasms' ancient starships. I'm worried that..."

"Don't you trust us?" Shen Zhong asked with narrowed eyes, his expression unpleasant. "If the three of us can't find that sphere of cyan light and bring it back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles, do you think the two of you will make a difference? Furthermore, if we all go after it together, who will take responsibility if those juniors are captured by the Spirit God Sect and Flame God Sect?"

"It's not that, it's just..." With these words, Gu Han smiled bitterly and nodded. "Alright, I'll return with Qiu Liang and take them back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles. Please take care of the matter here."

Shen Zhong disdained to reply to him.

Seeing that, Dong Mingxuan said, "You can rest assured. If we manage to bring that sphere of cyan light back to the Realm of a Hundred Battles, I guarantee you that we'll invite your clan to explore its secrets together."

"Good!" Gu Han sensed that the atmosphere was tensing up. Thus, he said no more and dashed back, following the route they had taken to get here.

"Please try your best." With these words, Qiu Liang sped off after him.

"What a small belly filled with chicken's guts!" (see note 1) After the two of them disappeared from their sight, Shen Zhong judged coldly.

Dong Mingxuan didn't make any comments, but rather turned to gaze off into the area ahead of them, sensing carefully with his soul power.

Moments later, he proposed, "Dong Li has her black phoenix, which means she has the ability to soar through the air for short periods of time. Even though her cultivation base is limited, and

she can't fly for a long time yet, she has already flown beyond the range my soul power can cover. I believe you'll come to the same discovery if you try to locate her yourselves.

"I suppose the three of us can split up and search. According to my estimation, in no longer than one hour, she'll have to land and recover."

Shen Zhong and Zhou Ruyun shared the same thoughts as him, and thus nodded in assent upon hearing his proposal.

After a moment of pondering, Dong Mingxuan added, "One more thing. If either of you come to find Dong Li and Wu Tian, will you please go all-out to save them?"

"Of course!" Zhou Ruyun answered without the slightest hesitation.

She was close friends with Dong Mingxuan, and the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce had close ties with the Dong Clan. She understood what Dong Mingxuan was worried about, and thus gave him her word without hesitation.

Then, Dong Mingxuan turned to look at Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect.

He was worried that Shen Zhong would be set on obtaining the Phantasms' sphere of cyan light, and ignore Dong Li's safety.

He believed that, deep down, Shen Zhong attached much more importance to the sphere of cyan light than Dong Li's safety.

"I promise you that I'll do my best to guarantee Dong Li's safety!" Shen Zhong said with a solemn expression on his face.

"By the way, what's the story with that Wu Tian kid?" Zhou Ruyun asked.

Shen Zhong's eyes flickered as he weighed in. "The way I see it, that Wu Tian is by no means ordinary. He's only at the Heaven stage, yet he was able to help Dong Li kill those Specters at the

center of the lake. I suspect that he's hiding something from us.”

Knowing Nie Tian's true identity perfectly well, Dong Mingxuan pondered for a moment, but still decided not to tell them.

After all, Nie Tian was the successor chosen by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace. Once Shen Zhong learned about his true identity, he was afraid that he would give in to his greed and conduct soul interrogations to force Nie Tian to tell him the secrets recorded in the refined fragmentary star marks.

“Dong Li insisted on bringing him. That's all I know.” Dong Mingxuan said with a plain tone.

“Alright, everybody. Let's spread out and search. Hopefully, we can find them soon.” With these words, Zhou Ruyun was the first to speed off into the distance.

Dong Mingxuan and Shen Zhong exchanged a glance, then headed out as well.

...

In the forest of lush, sky-reaching trees.

Dong Li was holding Nie Tian tightly with her arms and sailing through the air with the help of her black phoenix.

Just as her martial uncle, Dong Mingxuan, had predicted, since she was only at the early Greater Heaven stage, she wasn't able to conduct long-term flights with the black phoenix's help yet.

Her spiritual power rapidly ran low, and her black phoenix started to slow down.

She constantly jerked her head around to look back.

Originally, the Spirit Pearl, which was shining with a bizarre, cyan light, traveled at a slow speed in order to absorb the discarnate souls of the dead spirit beasts.

As time passed, the Spirit Pearl flew past the area where large amounts of spirit beasts were madly attacking each other.

Considering there weren't any more discarnate souls to collect, the Spirit Pearl was no longer distracted, and thus picked up speed.

Dong Li, on the other hand, had consumed too much of her spiritual power and psychic power by commanding her black phoenix for so long. Her black phoenix was also struggling to carry on, and thus its speed kept getting slower and slower.

The distance between them rapidly shortened.

After another call of Nie Tian's name was met with no response, Dong Li no longer attempted to wake Nie Tian, but rather focused on flying as fast as possible, hoping that they could escape the Spirit Pearl's pursuit.

She assumed that the Spirit Pearl wouldn't remain in the Realm of Dark Underworld for very long, and it would eventually circle back and reunite with the Phantasms' ancient starship.

She hoped that the Spirit Pearl would give up after a long, fruitless pursuit.

However, every time she turned around to look, the Spirit Pearl came slightly closer. It showed absolutely no sign of giving up, which made her increasingly stressed. "God damn it!"

Up till now, their exploration trip in the Realm of Dark Underworld could be considered a complete failure.

Not only hadn't they gained any useful cultivation materials or incantations from the "Phantasm relic", but they had even suffered great losses.

Now, the ancient starship had already flown out of the Realm of Dark Underworld, and she had no choice but to take Nie Tian and flee as far as possible.

Since the Spirit Pearl had previously slowed down to collect more discarnate souls, the distance between them was still quite considerable. However, that distance was rapidly shortening, and it wouldn't be long before the Spirit Pearl was able to launch its

formidable soul power attacks again.

In the meantime, Nie Tian seemed to have already passed out.

Once it attacked them, considering Dong Li's cultivation base and strength, she wouldn't even stand a chance.

"What should I do? What should we do now?" Heart burning with anxiety, she couldn't help but reconsider her previous decisions. "Did I make the right move by listening to Nie Tian and leaving the lake area? Would it have turned out better if we had stayed with Uncle Dong and the other Worldly realm experts? It's too late to turn around now, isn't it?"

At that moment, a sharp cry from the black phoenix suddenly rang out in her mind.

She, who had a profound bond with the black phoenix, immediately realized that the black phoenix had run out of energy, and had to return to her mind.

Desperation took over her.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

The black phoenix dove head first from the air towards the dense forest underneath. It couldn't stop wobbling, as it had apparently overdrawn its strength.

BANG!

Holding Nie Tian tightly in her arms, Dong Li landed heavily on the ground. As she did, the exhausted, black phoenix morphed into a wisp of black aura and returned to her mind.

She looked back and found that the Spirit Pearl had already appeared behind them, shining with misty, cyan light and exuding the purest phantasm Qi.

"We're done for." Dong Li's whole body ran cold.

WHOOSH!

Like a cyan lightning bolt, the Spirit Pearl stopped right in front of them.

Shining with bright, cyan light, the Spirit Pearl floated in midair five meters from her. However, it didn't unleash soul power attacks on her as she had expected.

It seemed as if, in the Spirit Pearl's eyes, Dong Li wasn't even worth killing, and it didn't intend to waste a smidgen of soul power on her before finishing off Nie Tian.

Like a floating eye, it stared at Nie Tian, and in the next moment, it started to unleash intense soul power fluctuations.

The seven fragmentary stars in the Nie Tian had long since become dim and lifeless. Like flickering candles that could go out at any moment, they seemed to be on the verge of exhausting their power.

However, the moment the Spirit Pearl unleashed its soul power fluctuations, Nie Tian's eyes snapped open.

After waking up, he instantly gazed at the magical item forged by the Phantasms, feeling the endless waves of negative emotions flooding towards his mind.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

All of a sudden, the Flame Dragon Armor in his bracelet of holding seemed to have sensed something, and thus flew out.

As it floated before Nie Tian, strong spatial energy fluctuations exploded from within the Blood Core embedded in its chest.

In a flash, a spatial vortex rapidly came to form in front of Nie Tian.

A shudder ran through Nie Tian's body.

The strange spatial vortex spun incredibly quickly, pulling half of Nie Tian's body into it.

Meanwhile, the Spirit Pearl burst out with blinding light and

flew into the vortex before Nie Tian's body had fully entered.

Standing to the side, Dong Li stared blankly at the spatial vortex as the Spirit Pearl and Nie Tian disappeared into it together.

Note:

1. The idiom the author has used here is 小肚鸡肠 (xiǎo dù jī cháng), which literally means small belly and chicken's guts. Its figurative meaning is petty or narrow-minded (regarding people).

Chapter 429: Smelting

Nie Tian and the Spirit Pearl disappeared before Dong Li's eyes almost simultaneously.

The spatial vortex also vanished after appearing out of nowhere, as if it had never been there.

Dong Li's jaw dropped.

Only after a while did she come to her senses and say with a flabbergasted expression on her face, "A tool that can form spatial tunnels at any time?"

In the Domain of the Falling Stars, most people would have to rely on large-scale, inter-realm teleportation portals to travel back and forth between realms.

She had only heard of spiritual tools that could rip open space and teleport people at anytime and anywhere, but she had never seen one with her own eyes.

This was her first time experiencing such a thing.

She had never expected that Nie Tian would actually possess such a profound spiritual tool, which only grand Qi warriors, extremely skilled at spatial magics, would possess.

Confusion and shock replaced the desperation on her face.

A train of thoughts entered Dong Li's mind. "Where the hell did he go? The Phantasms' Spirit Pearl went with him. Will he be able to survive it? Will he return?"

She slowly sat down on the ground, looking as if she had lost something important to her. Then, she took out a handful of medicinal pills and swallowed them as she mulled the matter over.

She failed to figure anything out after some time, but sounds of movement coming from the depths of the forest caught her ears.

She jerked her head around to gaze towards the source of the

sounds.

In the next moment, the figure of a man arrived before her like a flash. “Where’s that Wu Tian kid, Dong Li? And where did that sphere of cyan light go?”

It was Shen Zhong from the Pill Pavilion Sect.

As Dong Mingxuan had predicted, after dashing for an hour, he had successfully detected Dong Li’s life aura.

He followed her aura to this location, and discovered that Dong Li was the only one here. The Spirit Pearl, which he considered the most important target, was nowhere to be seen.

The truth was that he didn’t really care about Nie Tian and Dong Li’s safety. That Spirit Pearl was the only thing he could think about now.

He had long since seen that the Spirit Pearl had close ties with the Phantasms’ ancient starship, and that it must contain secrets and valuable information on the Phantasms.

If he could obtain it and unveil the profound mysteries within it, this exploration trip would turn out to be very productive.

With a grim look in her eyes, Dong Li looked down at the ground as she weighed over what to say.

A second later, she sorted through her thoughts. Looking up at Shen Zhong’s face, she said with an indifferent tone and slightly gritted teeth, “The Spirit Pearl’s target was Wu Tian, not me.”

“That thing is called a Spirit Pearl?” Shen Zhong asked, his eyes lighting up. “I figured that it was after Wu Tian, not you. But where is he?”

With a cold laugh, Dong Li said, “He woke up after we left the lake area. Since I was exhausted and couldn’t carry him any further, I could only land here. I realized that the Spirit Pearl was after him, and I could no longer protect him, so... I drove him

away. I told him to lead the Spirit Pearl away, so that at least one of us would live.”

Shen Zhong was taken aback. “Are you saying that you commanded him to flee after he woke up, so that the Spirit Pearl would go after him?”

“Yeah, would you expect me to die with him?” Dong Li said with an expression as if it was the right thing to do.

The tips of Shen Zhong’s eyebrows rose as he felt disgusted inwardly.

Since they were both from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, he had heard something about her notoriously cunning and vicious nature.

He assumed she had sacrificed her subordinate in order to save herself, knowing that the Spirit Pearl wasn’t after her.

Therefore, Shen Zhong bought Dong Li’s story.

Furthermore, he indeed couldn’t detect any signs of Nie Tian or the Spirit Pearl’s aura in the vicinity with his soul power.

He didn’t believe Dong Li was able to hide Nie Tian or the Spirit Pearl under his nose without him noticing anything.

Shen Zhong nodded gently and said, “Oh, so that’s how it is. So where did he go?”

Dong Li pointed out a random direction and said with a somewhat embarrassed expression, “What I did... wasn’t exactly honorable. Will you please keep it a secret, Senior Shen?”

Shen Zhong felt increasingly disgusted. “Sure, Wu Tian is one of your subordinates. How you treat him doesn’t concern me.” After uttering these words, he sped off in the direction Dong Li had pointed out for him.

Long after he was gone, Dong Li looked at the place Nie Tian had vanished from and muttered in a self-mocking way, “If it was

before, I probably would have actually considered doing such a thing. After all, this guy got me good and made me lose face before the whole clan. But now, I hope you can survive this and return alive.”

She didn't leave.

She had a feeling that Nie Tian's spatial spiritual tool might teleport him back to this very location.

Therefore, she decided to wait a while and see.

...

In an unknown heaven and earth, where the spiritual Qi was extremely rich and pure...

On a bloodstained, dilapidated altar faced by eight enormous dragon skulls, a bit of fire appeared and rapidly expanded.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Nie Tian and the Flame Dragon Armor flew out of a flaming portal one after the other.

After them, the unrelenting Spirit Pearl also flew into this mysterious land through the expanding ball of flames.

Like the Realm of Dark Underworld, the sky here was also misty. There was no sun, moon, or any stars, and there was no way to tell time.

As soon as the Spirit Pearl entered, it began to shine with dazzling, cyan light. In the next moment, countless discarnate souls and Specters flew out of it and swooped down towards Nie Tian.

The Spirit Pearl remained in midair, as if it were completely unaffected by the super gravity in this mysterious heaven and earth.

The heavy fall made Nie Tian light-headed. As soon as he recovered a sound mind, he saw countless discarnate souls and

Specters swarming towards him like a storm of locusts.

Subconsciously, he made attempts to summon the last remaining power from the seven fragmentary stars in his soul. However, it turned out that he couldn't draw upon any of it.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

At that moment, the Flame Dragon Armor took control and started absorbing pure flame power and flesh power from him.

Formidable flame power was suddenly born within its Blood Core, turning the Flame Dragon Armor, which was currently floating over Nie Tian's head, into a giant ball of torrential flames.

A dragon's howl rang out within Nie Tian's mind.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

Under his gaze, eight rivers of flames shot out from the ball of flames over his head and infused into the eight huge dragon skulls that were facing the dilapidated altar.

Each of the eight dragon skeletons was thousands of meters long, and their skulls were the size of small mountains.

As soon as the rivers of flames flew into the dragons' skulls, their flames of life seemed to light up again.

At that moment, it was as if the eight enormous dragons that had nothing but bones left were suddenly vested with life and souls again.

Originally, there was nothing inside their hollow eye sockets. But now, blazing flames appeared in them, serving as their eyeballs, making them look alive again.

The rivers of flames ran through the dragons' entire skeletons before spewing out of their opened mouths.

After flowing through the dragon skeletons, the might of the eight rivers of flame skyrocketed.

As they shot towards the dilapidated altar, Nie Tian felt a mysterious force from the Flame Dragon Armor, and was thrown away.

The Flame Dragon Armor, however, remained at the center of the altar, where it was engulfed by a storm of flames along with the Spirit Pearl and the swarm of discarnate souls and Specters it had unleashed.

CRACKLE! CRACKLE!

Nie Tian watched the dilapidated altar become enveloped by raging flames.

He could vaguely hear the discarnate souls and the Specters' miserable screams.

The Spirit Pearl seemed to sense the unfavorable situation and made repeated attempts to break free from the sea of flames enveloping the altar.

However, as unrivaled and powerful as it had appeared in the Realm of Dark Underworld, it failed to escape from the altar.

No matter how hard it tried, it couldn't charge out of the hemispherical area enveloping the altar, even though wasn't very wide.

After flowing through the dragon skeletons, the flames seemed to be vested with a divine power that allowed them to incinerate any life or soul in this heaven and earth.

At that moment, Nie Tian discovered that a distortion seemed to have occurred in the blazing space over the altar, as if even space couldn't withstand the heat.

Crackling sounds could be heard as the swarm of discarnate souls and Specters were being burned and purged of their negative energy fluctuations by the flames enhanced by the eight dragon skeletons.

Soon, wisps of refined, cyan-gray soul power, which could be absorbed as sources of energy, gradually rose from the sea of flames.

As that happened, Nie Tian noticed that the seven dim and lifeless fragmentary stars in his soul seemed to be stirred.

Immediately afterwards, the second fragmentary star mark, which he hadn't refined yet, separated itself from his chest and floated out.

Completely uncontrolled by Nie Tian, it quietly rose to a location three inches in front of the middle of his eyebrows, where it started to shine with blinding starlight.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

The wisps of pure soul power, which had been refined by the pure flames, were suddenly attracted and then rapidly flew straight into the fragmentary star mark floating before his face.

As the wisps of soul power entered the second fragmentary star mark, they seemed to be refined for a second time, becoming completely devoid of any impurities.

Afterwards, one wisp of incomparably pure soul power after another flew into his mind through the space between his eyebrows.

As soon as the seven fragmentary stars in his souls saw the appearance of the wisps of soul power, they started channeling them towards themselves.

The darkened fragmentary stars, which had already shrunk to the size of grains, started glittering brightly again after absorbing some wisps of soul power.

The scene before his eyes made Nie Tian tremble with a flabbergasted expression on his face. "T-this is...?!"

The Flame Dragon Armor, which had taken him to this

mysterious heaven and earth, was clearly using the altar and the eight sets of dragon skeletons to smelt the discarnate souls and Specters within the Spirit Pearl in a way he couldn't understand.

Even though he hadn't derived any enlightenment from the second fragmentary star mark yet, it was voluntarily cooperating with the Flame Dragon Armor to refine the wisps of soul power a second time before sending them directly into his mind.

All of this completely overturned his understanding of the Flame Dragon Armor and the fragmentary star marks!

Chapter 430: Entering the Greater Heaven Stage

The Flame Dragon Armor and the second fragmentary star mark worked together to build him a great fortune.

When he had been at his wit's end and could only wait for his imminent death, the Flame Dragon Armor had rushed out, formed a spatial vortex, and brought him to this mysterious heaven and earth.

It had also taken advantage of the dilapidated altar and the eight sets of dragon skeletons surrounding it, and formed an unknown formation of flames.

The Spirit Pearl, which had blindly barged in in an attempt to kill Nie Tian, had immediately been trapped.

The torrential flames smelted every single discarnate soul and Specter it had unleashed and turned them into wisps of pure, cyan-gray soul power.

Then, the wisps of soul power rose from the altar and were channeled into the second fragmentary star mark, where they were refined a second time before being sent into Nie Tian's soul as wisps of incomparably pure soul power.

As one wisp after another flew into Nie Tian's soul, the seven darkened fragmentary stars, which had shrunk to the size of grains, began to shine brightly again.

At the same time, Nie Tian could sense with great clarity that the head-splitting pain he had been experiencing was being greatly relieved.

He immediately realized that he had injured his own soul by overly consuming the power within the seven fragmentary stars to ward off the Spirit Pearl's soul fluctuations.

Right now, his soul and the fragmentary stars in it were gradually healing.

Raging flames were still ravishing the space above the altar. The Spirit Pearl flashed about here and there, but still couldn't break free from the sea of flames.

The power within the Spirit Pearl, as well as the swarming Specters and discarnate souls it had unleashed, were being purged by the blazing flames. After being refined a second time by the fragmentary star mark floating before Nie Tian's eyes, they were all turned into wisps of pure soul power that disappeared into Nie Tian's soul.

As they received this replenishment, not only did the seven fragmentary stars in his soul light up again, but they also began to expand in size.

It wasn't long before Nie Tian realized that, as the fragmentary stars in his soul absorbed abundant amounts of pure soul power, the spiritual Qi in this mysterious heaven and earth started to quietly converge on him as well.

He was instantly taken over by a strange feeling.

He felt that, thanks to the existence of the Flame Dragon Armor and the fragmentary star mark, his ability to attract and absorb energy from his surroundings had greatly improved.

With this thought in mind, he took out a spirit stone and made an experiment by absorbing its power.

The spiritual power within it poured madly into the spiritual sea in his dantian.

The spirit stone cracked in a split second.

Nie Tian was taken aback.

Immediately afterwards, he took out a number of spiritual materials of fire and wood attributes, as well as some Star Stones.

He spread them out on the ground in front of him. As he placed his hands on some of them and practiced the most basic Qi Refining incantation, the energy within them would be drained within a second.

Soon, they were all reduced to ordinary stones and cracked open.

Just like that, copious amount of flame power, wood power, and star power were channeled into the relevant vortexes and refined at an unprecedentedly high speed.

He examined himself with rapt attention, and discovered that he seemed to have ascended to an incomparably mysterious state, where he had become a bottomless black hole, absorbing all kinds of power at alarming rates.

This was something he had never felt before.

He knew that many factors could have contributed to it.

It could be that the formation of the altar and the eight sets of dragon skeletons were emanating some kind of energy fluctuation; it could be caused by something happening within the second fragmentary star mark; or it could be caused by the unique features of this strange heaven and earth.

Even though he couldn't figure out what was causing this, he knew that he had better take full advantage of it and try to maximize his gains from it.

Therefore, he took a deep breath and stopped looking at the altar, the Flame Dragon Armor, the Spirit Pearl, and the dragon skeletons.

He took out a large number of Star Stones, spirit stones, and spirit jades, as well as spiritual materials that contained flame power and wood power, and piled them into small hills around him.

Sitting among the pyramids of spiritual materials, he placed his hands on them and practiced the Qi Refining Incantation silently.

Then, his whole body seemed to turn into a giant magnet that started madly absorbing power of various attributes from those spiritual materials.

Plain spiritual power, star power, flame power, and wood power condensed into misty rivers of different colors before pouring into his vortexes of spiritual power.

The various vortexes of spiritual power rotated at alarming rates, improving the speed at which they refined spiritual power severalfold.

A huge turbulence also rose in Nie Tian's spiritual sea as it continued to refine the spiritual power within it and expand its boundaries.

At the same time, the seven fragmentary stars in his soul kept gathering more soul power and growing larger like glittering gems.

Before long, he sensed that he was reaching the bottleneck, through which he would step into the Greater Heaven stage.

He had just made a minor breakthrough in his cultivation several months ago atop one of the three extremely lofty mountain peaks in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations.

Normally speaking, it was very unlikely that he would come to another bottleneck in such a short time.

He had never thought that his next breakthrough would come so soon.

What he didn't know was that he had already passed a major mental tribulation when he had returned from the Realm of Split Void to the Realm of Flame Heaven and revisited Black Cloud City.

The dark side of human nature he had witnessed in Black Cloud City had almost caused him to deviate from the righteous cultivation path and sink into killing and plundering.

He had seen too much of the ugliness of human nature after

returning to the Realm of Flame Heaven. His values and personality almost grew twisted because of it.

Later, when he had gone to the Realm of Mystic Heaven, he had witnessed the Heaven Palace Sect, which was the most powerful and revered of the Domain of the Falling Stars, making deals with Demon outsiders, which had deeply disappointed him.

Afterwards, when he had visited the Realm of a Thousand Devastations, he hadn't held his hopes very high. However, the Qi warriors from the Yin Sect, the Yang Sect, and the other smaller sects had finally brought him a shred of warmth and shone a beam of light into his heart.

To this point, he had both seen the bright side and the dark side of human nature from the things he had experienced.

After going through so many complicated and unforeseen events, his mind had grown remarkably, even though he didn't realize it himself.

Several months ago, in order to help the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect secure the scrolls in those mountain peaks, he had spent numerous days and nights accumulating strength and deriving enlightenment from the profundity of flame power, star power, and wood power. That had greatly improved his mastery of these powers.

Therefore, he had long since achieved the most important thing to a breakthrough in cultivation: new understanding and mental growth.

At this moment, as wisps of pure soul power continued to infuse into him along with copious amount of various powers, the other requirement of achieving a breakthrough in cultivation, strength accumulation, was also nearing its breakthrough point.

That was why he was able to come to another bottleneck in his cultivation after merely a few months.

“The Greater Heaven stage!” He grew excited as he took advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity and did his utmost to absorb all sorts of powers.

Without a sun, a moon, or any stars, Nie Tian couldn’t keep track of time.

Indulged in his inner world, he practice cultivation wholeheartedly, waiting for his next breakthrough.

He was aware that considering he practiced flame power incantations, star power incantations, and wood power incantations, his advancing speed should have been slower than others’.

If it weren’t for this miraculous incident, even though he possessed extraordinary talent, he would have had to spend a long time accumulating strength mentally and physically to come to the next bottleneck.

Therefore, he cherished this opportunity a great deal. No matter what, he planned to keep practicing as long as the situation allowed.

CRACK! CRACK!

Wisps of cyan-gray soul power continued to rise from the Spirit Pearl, which was engulfed by the raging flames.

The discarnate souls and Specters it had previously unleashed had long since been transformed into pure soul power and fed to the fragmentary stars in Nie Tian’s soul.

After an unknown period of time, a brand new vortex of spiritual power came to shape in Nie Tian’s spiritual sea.

Almost at the same time, two more fragmentary stars gradually formed over his soul sea.

At this moment, the seven original fragmentary stars had already expanded to the size of fists. The light they emanated had also

become even more dazzling.

However, they seemed to be subject to some kind of restriction and couldn't split into more.

By the time they grew as large as fists, they stopped absorbing soul power, as if they had reached their limit.

However, as soon as a seventh vortex of spiritual power appeared in his spiritual sea, the restriction in his soul seemed to be broken.

That was when two new fragmentary stars were born.

The two new fragmentary stars continued to absorb soul power, and only after a while did they fully form and stabilize.

However, they were only the size of grains, far smaller compared to the other seven fragmentary stars.

But as they became fully formed, their attraction towards the soul power seemed to grow increasingly strong.

A long time passed...

The flames over the dilapidated altar went out. Every last shred of power within the Spirit Pearl, as well as every discarnate soul and Specter it had gathered, had been refined and absorbed by Nie Tian.

The Spirit Pearl sat still in the middle of the altar. Translucent and cyan, not the slightest anomaly could be sensed in it, much less any soul power fluctuations.

The two newly-formed fragmentary stars in Nie Tian's soul had stopped expanding.

Compared to the other seven, the two new fragmentary stars seemed noticeably smaller, as if they hadn't received enough soul power from the Spirit Pearl.

Meanwhile, the seventh vortex of spiritual power was also fully formed in Nie Tian's spiritual sea.

All these signs marked his advancement to the Greater Heaven stage!

Chapter 431: I've Been Waiting for You!

In the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Dong Li had stayed in that very location since Nie Tian had vanished.

Soon after Shen Zhong had found her and asked her about Nie Tian and the Spirit Pearl's whereabouts, her martial uncle, Dong Mingxuan, had also sought her out and asked the same questions.

However, even though Dong Mingxuan was a senior in her clan, she had chosen not to tell him the truth, but instead told him that the Spirit Pearl had chased Nie Tian away.

Dong Mingxuan had also failed to detect any signs of life in the vicinity.

Seeing that she was recovering her strength, Dong Mingxuan had reminded her to be careful.

Dong Li had told her that she would leave the Realm of Dark Underworld as soon as her strength was restored.

With a nod, Dong Mingxuan had sped away. Dong Li, however, had stayed in place.

A few days passed...

Shen Zhong, Dong Mingxuan, and Zhou Ruyun had failed to find the Spirit Pearl or Nie Tian after conducting a thorough search of the area.

However, the three of them had been unwilling to give up, and thus spent two more weeks searching in other areas of the Realm of Dark Underworld.

Yet, they still hadn't discovered a single sign of the Spirit Pearl or Nie Tian.

Therefore, they had given up, as reluctant as they had been. Then, they had returned via the inter-realm teleportation portal

they had set up in the Realm of Dark Underworld.

By the time they had returned to the Realm of a Hundred Battles, all the juniors had already returned, but Dong Li hadn't been among them.

Dong Li had never left the location where Nie Tian had vanished.

Time flew... Another month passed...

Having long since recovered her strength, Dong Li hid herself in the luxuriant foliage of a huge ancient tree, practicing cultivation with spirit stones as she waited for Nie Tian.

Her instincts told her that Nie Tian would show up in this place at some point.

Recently, she had repeatedly spotted air-transportation spiritual tools flashing by over her head, as well as search teams consisting of local Heaven and Greater Heaven stage Qi warriors.

She had been lucky that no Worldly realm Qi warriors like Tang Yang had come to search in this area, so she hadn't exposed herself yet.

Even so, she felt increasingly insecure and uneasy.

Over the past few days, local Qi warriors had come to this area more frequently than before. She felt that if she continued to stay in this place, it would be very likely that she would be discovered.

Hence, she began to consider the option of returning to the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

However, for some reason, she seemed to be obsessed with this matter. She just wanted to wait for Nie Tian's return, or the Spirit Pearl's, which would at least prove Nie Tian's death.

Either way, she needed an answer.

Another three days passed, and the local Qi warriors visited this area more and more frequently. There were even a few times where she was on the verge of being exposed.

She suspected that they must have learned what had happened in that lake.

Due to the leaving of the Phantasms' ancient starship and the explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, the local Qi warriors couldn't find a single living person to question.

They probably had determined that people from the other realms had visited that area, and thus were conducting an inch-by-inch search of the nearby areas.

As much as she wanted to keep waiting, knowing that if she didn't leave soon she would be exposed, she finally decided to leave.

In the mysterious land, Nie Tian opened his eyes.

Nine bright sparks could be seen in the depths of each of his eyes as he paced towards the altar.

The flames had already gone out; the Flame Dragon Armor and the Spirit Pearl were both sitting silently at the center of the altar. The Flame Dragon Armor seemed to have consumed too much flame power, and thus was no longer radiant with fiery light.

Every shred of power within the Spirit Pearl had been refined by the Flame Dragon Armor, along with the Specters and discarnate souls it had gathered. Now, it seemed empty and without any wonder.

Nie Tian had successfully entered the Greater Heaven stage. Nine fragmentary stars were shining brightly in his soul.

With a frown, he bent down and picked up the Spirit Pearl. Then, he sent a wisp of his psychic awareness into the wondrous item forged by the Phantasms.

As his psychic awareness roamed inside of it, Nie Tian realized that there was another dimension inside, which seemed to be able to attract and gather discarnate souls.

However, it was completely empty and lifeless at this moment.

Withdrawing his psychic awareness, he reached out to grab the Flame Dragon Armor.

The moment his hand made contact with it, it started to rapidly absorb his flame power and flesh power.

In the next moment, the same spatial vortex that had taken him to this place formed in front of him.

Nie Tian's eyebrows flickered as he immediately understood what was happening.

The Flame Dragon Armor had almost completely drained the flame power it had gathered all these years by refining the Spirit Pearl.

Its remaining power was already insufficient to create another spatial vortex and teleport him out of this place. Therefore, it could only channel power from him.

Originally, he had intended to remain in this mysterious heaven and earth for some time.

He still wanted to derive new enlightenment from the enormous mountain-like arms sticking out of the earth. Perhaps he would be able to learn some new profound magics and incantations.

However, since the Blood Core had taken him to this mysterious dimension a few times now, he had learned that it would require a substantial amount of energy to take him either into or out of here.

At this moment, the Flame Dragon Armor had already spent too much energy refining the Spirit Pearl.

He realized that it was about time he left.

He was also aware that he probably wouldn't be able to revisit this mysterious dimension with the help of the Flame Dragon Armor in the near future.

He would have to seek out a unique place that was extremely rich

in flame power for the Flame Dragon Armor to recharge itself.

The spatial vortex rapidly took shape.

Realizing that he had no choice, Nie Tian stopped hesitating and jumped right into it.

In the Realm of Dark Underworld...

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

In the location Nie Tian and the Spirit Pearl had vanished from, a small but bright spatial vortex suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Upon returning to the Realm of Dark Underworld, Nie Tian subconsciously glanced around, but found no one.

He was well-aware that he must have spent quite some time in that mysterious land.

He had no idea what the situation was going to be here.

Without even thinking about it, he unleashed his Heaven Eyes.

Considering there were nine fragmentary stars in his soul now, nine Heaven Eyes came to form this time.

Furthermore, both the coverage and perception of his nine Heaven Eyes seemed to have been greatly enhanced.

As they slowly spread out and floated in different directions, clear scenes of the vicinity appeared in Nie Tian's mind.

Soon, he discovered a large number of local Qi warriors in a ten kilometer radius around him. From the way they were dressed, he rapidly recognized that some of them were from the Flame God Sect and the Spirit God Sect.

Via one of his Heaven Eyes, he caught sight of Dong Li, who was now marching forward cautiously, hoping not to expose her tracks. "Dong Li! How come she's still here!?"

SHEW!

He blurred into action and approached Dong Li with a few short-

range Starshifts.

Moments later, he flashed into appearance right before her.

Moving stealthily, Dong Li was dazzled by a flash of starlight before a man appeared in front of her. “Nie Tian!”

“Why haven’t you returned to the Realm of a Hundred Battles?” Nie Tian asked, looking puzzled.

Dong Li’s eyes shone with the light of excitement, yet she glared at him and said, gnashing her teeth, “What do you think?! I was waiting for you!”

A confused expression spread out across Nie Tian’s face. “Waiting for me?! Why would you do that?”

Dong Li’s expression stiffened as her heart was filled with a sudden anger. She even wanted to lunge forward and scratch Nie Tian’s confused face off.

However, she curbed her impulse.

After all, she knew that local Qi warriors were still searching for clues in this area.

If she got into a fight with Nie Tian here, the noise would instantly attract those Qi warriors’ attention and thus expose them.

Seeing the furious expression on her face, Nie Tian changed the subject. “What’s situation here? Where is everybody?”

“They’ve all returned to the Realm of a Hundred Battles!” Dong Li blurted angrily.

Surprised, Nie Tian asked again, “Then why didn’t you go with them?”

“I’ve been waiting for you! How many times do you need to hear me say it?!” Dong Li thundered in a restrained manner.

Rubbing his chin, Nie Tian said with an innocent expression on

his face, “But I didn’t tell you to wait for me.”

“I don’t want to speak to you anymore!” Dong Li thundered, her eyes wide. “I know you have your unique methods. Guide us out of this place, and don’t let the people from the Realm of Dark Underworld discover us! I’ll settle things with you when we are out of here!”

“Okay...” Nie Tian nodded as he tapped into his nine Heaven Eyes in the vicinity and determined the best evacuation route.

Standing beside him, Dong Li glared silently at him, her heart filled with grievance and anger.

Moments later, Nie Tian picked out a direction and marched out, leading the way for Dong Li. “Follow me.”

Following him, Dong Li panted with fury. Every once in a while, she would curse in low voice, “Dumb ingrate! I should have let you die over that lake!

“Your conscientiousness must have been eaten by a dog!

“I’ll make you pay for this!”

Chapter 432: Slight Changes in the Spiritual Sea

Even though she couldn't stop secretly cursing Nie Tian, Dong Li trusted his judgment.

She felt very secure following him, even though she knew that many local Qi warriors were searching in the vicinity.

She believed that Nie Tian would be able to guide them out of this area.

Her strong trust in him came from the repeated failures and losses she had suffered from him, as well as the fact that he had saved her from the Spirit Pearl's influence when she had almost given in and been devoured by the mountains of corpses and seas of blood.

Nie Tian heard her quiet curses, but said nothing.

With the help of his nine Heaven Eyes, he gained a thorough understanding of every local Qi warrior's location and movements.

Now that the fragmentary stars in his soul had expanded to the size of fists, both the coverage and perception of his Heaven Eyes had risen to a whole new level.

Following Nie Tian's directions, the two of them effortlessly steered clear of every local Qi warrior in the vicinity.

Two days passed...

Under Nie Tian's leadership, they marched out of the area roamed by local search teams, and found themselves at the foot of a grayish-yellow mountain peak.

Nie Tian found a suitable spot and sat down on the ground, saying, "We can finally have a rest. Those local Qi warriors are only searching the area around the lake. Now that we're far enough from the lake, we should be safe for now."

Dong Li also heaved a sigh of relief.

Over the past two days, she had followed Nie Tian closely as the two of them marched on at a fast pace. Whenever she felt like it, she would secretly curse Nie Tian for not appreciating her kindness.

However, now that they were out of danger, she surprisingly kept quiet, and didn't start bickering.

Just like Nie Tian, she sought another clean rock and sat down on it, her cold gaze fixed on him.

Nie Tian, however, remained expressionless as he took out a number of spirit stones and started recuperating.

As he practiced the Qi Refining Incantation, the spiritual power within those spirit stones was rapidly drawn away by him.

In the meantime, the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth started converging on him and pouring into his spiritual sea from every direction.

Nie Tian's eyebrows flickered.

Since he had returned to the Realm of Dark Underworld as soon as he had entered the Greater Heaven stage, he hadn't had a chance to thoroughly sense the difference between the Greater Heaven stage and the Heaven stage.

Now, he sensed with great clarity that, the moment he started practicing the Qi Refining Incantation, a copious amount of the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth started converging on him.

Even when he stopped practicing it, the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth that had been gathered to this place didn't dissipate, but rather continued to slowly infuse into his spiritual sea.

Eyes narrowed, he examined himself and everything around him with rapt attention, and he was overcome by a feeling that he had become one with heaven and earth.

Dong Li's eyes suddenly lit up. "Greater Heaven stage!"

With her eyes fixed on Nie Tian, she asked, "You've only been gone for less than two months. How could you have entered the Greater Heaven stage within such a short time?"

The whole way here, she had fought her curiosity and kept all her questions to herself.

Where had Nie Tian been during this period of time? Where was the Spirit Pearl?

At this moment, after being shocked by the fact that Nie Tian had actually advanced into the Greater Heaven stage within such a short time, she could no longer suppress her curiosity.

However, just as she was going to ask, Nie Tian muttered in a low voice, looking overjoyed, "Interesting..."

That was because he realized that his spiritual sea, the seven vortexes of spiritual power, and the vortexes of star power, wood power, and flame power were all very different from before.

Back when he had been at the Heaven stage, all of the vortexes had remained in the same location in his spiritual sea.

However, after advancing to the Greater Heaven stage, the vortexes had started to move in some profound pattern in his spiritual sea as they revolved on their own axes. At first glance, they seemed like tornadoes whooshing across his sea of spiritual power.

As they floated about, they seemed to form mysterious formations from time to time.

Such a change in his spiritual sea allowed him to attract and absorb spiritual energy from his surroundings even when he wasn't practicing the Qi Refining Incantation.

Right now, the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth seemed to be naturally drawn in by his seven vortexes of spiritual power and

infused into his spiritual sea.

He could also sense wisps of faint wood power rising from the nearby dense forest before flying into his vortex of wood power.

Even though it was currently nighttime, the heavens were misty and gray in the Realm of Dark Underworld year-round. No sun, moon, or stars could be seen in the sky.

However, he could still feel starlight invisible to the naked eye penetrating the layers of gray cloud and infusing into his vortex of star power.

The only type of power he couldn't sense was flame power, since there weren't any active volcanoes in the vicinity.

Meanwhile, as he started practicing the Qi Refining Incantation devotedly, the speed at which he absorbed energies from his surroundings enhanced severalfold, and so did the speed at which he channeled power from the spirit stones.

After entering the Greater Heaven stage, the efficiency at which he absorbed energy had improved significantly.

Even though he still couldn't figure out the profound reasons behind this phenomenon, it made him realize his breakthrough into the Greater Heaven stage meant much more than having an additional vortex of spiritual power.

“Where... where have you been during this whole time?”

After a moment of hesitation, Dong Li gave in to her intense curiosity and gave voice to the question in her heart.

Nie Tian stopped meditating and leveled his chin to look at her.

Dong Li was bewildered.

Nie Tian's eyes had somehow become so much brighter that she didn't even dare to look directly at them.

That was when she realized that miraculous changes must have happened to Nie Tian during the time he was gone.

Normally speaking, the brighter a man's eyes looked, the more refined the man's psychic power would be.

Since she, who was also at the Greater Heaven stage, couldn't even bear to gaze into Nie Tian's eyes, it meant that his cultivation of psychic power must have gone through significant improvement during this period of time.

Then, it suddenly occurred to her that the changes in Nie Tian's eyes probably had something to do with the Spirit Pearl.

However, what she didn't know was that the changes had actually been caused by the nine fragmentary stars in his soul, which contained extremely pure soul power.

His eyes were already very bright when he wasn't practicing the Fragmentary Star Incantation. Once he used the secret magics recorded in the Fragmentary Star Incantation, nine sparks of starlight would even appear in the depths of his pupils.

After a quick glance at Nie Tian, Dong Li withdrew her gaze. With a self-mocking laugh, she shook her head and said, "Nevermind."

A puzzled expression spread across Nie Tian's face. "Hmm?"

"That should be one of your biggest secrets." Dong Li said with a cold snort. "There's no point in me asking, since you won't tell me the truth anyway. Instead of listening to your lies, I'd rather not ask about it."

After a brief pondering, Nie Tian said, "Alright then."

She was right. He indeed wouldn't tell her about what had happened to him.

"The Spirit Pearl didn't return to the Phantasms' ancient starship, did it?" Dong Li asked in a soft voice.

"No, it didn't," Nie Tian answered.

"Good." Dong Li nodded and looked down, as if something that

had been weighing on her mind was finally lifted. Then, she suddenly said, “Two months ago, you asked me to take you as far as away from the lake as possible. Did you do it so that you could have the Spirit Pearl for yourself? Were you worried that Shen Zhong, Gu Han, and the others would demand it from you afterwards if you had somehow obtained it?”

Only then did it occur to her that the reason behind Nie Tian being so urgent to leave the lake area could be that he hadn’t wanted to share the Spirit Pearl with the other explorers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

Nie Tian smiled bitterly. “Of course not. I’m not you. I’ll never be that good with schemes. Back then, I just felt that Qin Yan, Cao Qiushui, and the others wouldn’t be able to help me. I thought that getting far away from that ancient starship might make the Spirit Pearl give up on chasing after me.

“Also, I didn’t know how the battle between your seniors and the Phantasms would end.”

“Really?” Dong Li asked, a skeptical expression filling her face.

Nie Tian nodded. “Really.”

Eyebrows furrowed, Dong Li pondered in silence, and said after a moment, “This time, the five major powers in the Realm of a Hundred Battles mobilized quite a few people to explore the so-called Phantasm relic, yet we didn’t come to find anything worth noting. But you, on the other hand, got that Spirit Pearl... So, what do you plan to do next?”

Nie Tian fell silent upon hearing her question.

Originally, he had only come because he wanted to keep his word. However, the Spirit Pearl had somehow followed him into the mysterious dimension, where he had refined and absorbed every single discarnate soul and Specter within it.

Not only had the Spirit Pearl ended up in his possession, but he

had also entered the Greater Heaven stage.

Apparently, he was the one who had benefited from the exploration trip the most.

Normally, people on the exploration team would have to divide whatever spoils they discovered.

Looking at Dong Li, he took the Spirit Pearl out from within his bracelet of holding after a moment of hesitation. Handing it to her, he said, "Here, take it."

Dong Li grabbed the Spirit Pearl, examined it with her psychic awareness, and failed to find anything fascinating inside. "What happened to it? Where are the Specters within it?"

Nie Tian smiled at her, but remained silent.

With a cold snort, Dong Li handed the Spirit Pearl back to him and said indignantly, "I think it goes without saying that you've already taken away the parts that are truly valuable, right?"

Nie Tian didn't deny it. He nodded and said, "Do you want this pearl or not?"

"Forget it," Dong Li said, shaking her head. "By the way, I didn't tell anyone about what happened to you and the Spirit Pearl. My martial uncle, Shen Zhong, and the others took my word and believed that the Spirit Pearl chased you off somewhere. After a long and fruitless search, they eventually returned to the Realm of a Hundred Battles."

"Many thanks." Nie Tian said.

"As for this Spirit Pearl, I don't know how to use it, and I can't take it back to the Dong Clan without provoking questions. You can have it." Looking coldly at Nie Tian, she continued, "But you've got to remember that you owe me a favor, considering that you've taken the only truly valuable gain from this trip! Even though you've saved me once, you've got to remember that you owe me!"

“Okay...” Nie Tian nodded in assent. “Oh right, do you know a place that’s famous for its rich flame power?”

“The Flame God Sect, of course,” Dong Li answered.

Nie Tian smiled bitterly.

The reason he was asking about a place that was rich in flame power was so that the Flame Dragon Armor would be able to recharge itself. However, he had accidentally acquired the Flame Dragon Armor from someone from the Flame God Sect. How would he dare to blunder into the Flame God Sect’s turf?

Chapter 433: Desolate City

“Is there anywhere else that’s famous for its rich flame power?” Nie Tian asked.

“The Realm of Unbounded Desolation, I suppose,” Dong Li said.

A puzzled expression spread across Nie Tian’s face. “The Realm of Unbounded Desolation?”

Dong Li’s charming brows furrowed as she said, “Yeah. Why do you ask?”

“As you know, I possess a spiritual tool, the Flame Dragon Armor.” Nie Tian didn’t try to conceal his true intentions. “Well, it almost drained the flame power it has accumulated all these years to help me deal with the Spirit Pearl. So, I need to find a place for it to regather the copious amount of flame power it requires.”

“I see...” Dong Li said, nodding. “The largest and most active volcano in the Domain of the Falling Stars is in the Flame God Sect’s territory. Rumor has it that it has been spewing blazing lava every once in a while for the past ten thousand years. But the Flame God Sect has long since taken it for their own, and keeps a close watch on everything around it. I know you wouldn’t want to go there.”

She also knew the relationship between the Flame Dragon Armor and the Flame God Sect.

“However, as grand and miraculous as that volcano is, it’s only one volcano,” Dong Li said, her eyes narrowed. “That’s not the case in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Active, lava-spewing volcanoes can be found everywhere in the endless mountain ranges of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Even though none of the volcanoes are comparable to the one in the Flame God Sect’s territory, they have the numbers to make up for it.”

With these words, she halted briefly and said, “Plus, many of

them are still unclaimed. If you want to recharge the Flame Dragon Armor with the flame power in active volcanoes, the Realm of Unbounded Desolation is probably the place you want to be.

“Aside from that, a grand Qi warrior event is going to be held in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation soon. You should go check it out. I’m sure it will broaden your horizons.

“Have you heard a saying that goes: equipment forgers in all lands originate from the Tool Sect?”

Nie Tian shook his head.

Dong Li rolled her eyes at him. “Such an idiot... The Tool Sect in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation is the origin of every equipment forger in the Domain of the Falling Stars. As far as I know, the first sectmaster and founder of the Spiritual Treasure Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven was a disciple of the Tool Sect. Technically speaking, the Spiritual Treasure Sect can be considered a branch of the Tool Sect. It’s just that the Tool Sect hasn’t officially acknowledged the relationship between them.”

Nie Tian was taken aback. “The first sectmaster of the Spiritual Treasure Sect was a disciple of the Tool Sect in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?”

Dong Li’s watery eyes glittered as she said with a smile, “What’s there to gasp about? The Spiritual Treasure Sect isn’t the only one that has connections with the Tool Sect. Many equipment forgers from the Heaven Palace Sect in the Realm of Mystic Heaven, the Yin Sect and Yang Sect in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations, and many other sects also have close connections with the Tool Sect.

“They’re either former disciples of the Tool Sect, or they’ve once studied equipment forging skills in the Tool Sect, or they’ve been rated by the Tool Sect.

“Oh right, Li Ye’s master used to be a renowned equipment

forged of the Tool Sect as well.

“She was defeated in the competition for the sectmaster’s position. After that, she left the Tool Sect in a huff, and has been living in the Realm of Split Void since then.

“The Tool Sect’s decennial Equipment Forger Assessment Assembly will be held shortly. I’ve heard that Li Ye is going as well. He wants to take advantage of this opportunity and certify his status as a Premium grade equipment forger.

“Other than him, I’ve heard that Fang Hui from the Spiritual Treasure Sect is going to attend the assessment of Spirit Channeling grade equipment forgers.”

Nie Tian seemed overwhelmed as he asked, “Equipment Forger Assessment Assembly? Why would equipment forgers go to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to attend this assessment event held by the Tool Sect?”

“That’s because only when the Tool Sect has determined that someone qualifies as a Premium grade equipment forger will others acknowledge his or her status as a Premium grade equipment forger.” Dong Li went on and explained to him, “For example, it seems that Li Ye is capable of forging Premium grade spiritual tools now. Therefore, he should be considered a Premium grade equipment forger now, right?”

“However, not everyone knows or believes that he’s capable of forging Premium grade spiritual tools.

“However, once he has been assessed by the Tool Sect and carries an identity medallion issued by them, everyone will acknowledge his status as a Premium grade equipment forger.

“If he’s still regarded as a Medium grade equipment forger in Shatter City, the price of his products will continue to be fairly low.

“Once he obtains an identity medallion for Premium grade

equipment forgers issued by the Tool Sect, his status and prices will be very different. Even if people still ask him to forge Medium grade spiritual tools, he will be able to charge a higher price.

“Furthermore, only after he has obtained a Premium grade equipment forger’s identity medallion will people trust him to do a good job forging a Premium grade spiritual tool.

“The identity medallion issued by the Tool Sect symbolizes an equipment forger’s capability and status, which will be acknowledged by everyone and every sect throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars.”

After a brief halt, Dong Li added, “Fang Hui from the Spiritual Treasure Sect, along with many other Premium grade equipment forgers, had their status determined during these assessment Assemblies.”

Nie Tian was surprised.

After hearing that Fang Hui and Li Ye were going to attend this grand event in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, he grew increasingly intrigued.

“This grand event in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will attract countless equipment forgers from around the Domain of the Falling Stars. The participants will forge spiritual tools of various grades during the assessment assembly, many of which will be sold on site. Therefore, not only are equipment forgers going to attend, but powerful Qi warriors from various sects will also be there.

“Most people don’t usually get the opportunity to meet top equipment forgers, much less ask them to forge spiritual tools for them.

“Therefore, this assembly held by the Tool Sect will be a perfect opportunity for those who have gathered enough materials and want to have customized spiritual tools made that agree with

them.

“Truth be told, I was planning to go to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation after this exploration trip.

“Now that you’re in search of a place that’s rich in flame power to recharge the Flame Dragon Armor, we might as well go together.”

After a moment of pondering, Nie Tian nodded. “Alright, let’s go to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation together.”

Seeing that Nie Tian had agreed, Dong Li smile heartily and said, “Okay, I’ll take you to the inter-realm teleportation portal we’ve set up in the Realm of Dark Underworld. From there, we’ll teleport to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation directly. You’ll be responsible for keeping an eye out for local Qi warriors and making sure we don’t get exposed.”

“No problem,” Nie Tian replied.

With a soft laugh, Dong Li took out a map from within her ring of holding and started glancing around, trying to determine their current location.

A while later, she pointed in a direction, saying, “That way.”

“Okay.”

...

In the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Cracks filled the dried-up, dark-red earth. Mountain ranges filled with sparsely-vegetated mountain peaks of various heights stretched out as far as the eye could see.

In remote locations, thick smoke was rising from some of the mountain peaks, along with occasional flames and deep rumbles.

The hot and dry Desolate City sat at the cracked bottom of a basin. Under the scorching sun, Qi warriors in Desolate City frequently wiped sweat from their faces, cursing the horrible

weather in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Like Water Moon City, Desolate City wasn't surrounded by high walls. Everyone was free to enter or exit the city.

Even so, the Tool Sect was its undisputed master.

At this moment, all of the dilapidated stone pavilions in the city were filled with visitors.

In a corner of Desolate City, Li Ye was standing at the windowsill of a two-floored pavilion made of crimson stones. Looking down at the endless stream of people in the street, he said to Pei Qiqi beside him, "When will our master return from her trip, senior martial sister? The Tool Sect's assessment assembly is in less than a month. I kinda want to see her before it starts."

"Master is currently in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation." Pei Qiqi said with her usual expressionless face. "It's just that she's forging something for someone, so she won't visit us until she's finished."

She shot Li Ye a glance from the corner of her eyes. "You're not afraid of failing, are you?"

Li Ye laughed out loud. "How can I fail?! The Flame Star I forged for Nie Tian is an indisputably Premium grade spiritual tool! The fact that I can forge the Flame Star means that I can forge another Premium grade spiritual tool at the Tool Sect's assessment assembly! If people didn't only acknowledge the identity medallions issued by the Tool Sect, I wouldn't have wasted my time by coming here.

"Just remember not to lose face for our master," Pei Qiqi said coldly. "She should have become the sectmaster of the Tool Sect. That was such a narrow loss. Now that she's left the Tool Sect and you're her only disciple who specializes in equipment forging, you can't let those from the Tool Sect laugh at us!"

"I know, I know," Li Ye said in an unrestrained and carefree

manner. “I’m such a talented young Premium grade equipment forger. How in the world will I embarrass master? Oh right, have you really never seen Nie Tian after you were separated in the Realm of Flame Heaven?”

Pei Qiqi’s eyebrows furrowed slightly as she said, “No.”

Chapter 434: The Tool Sect

Inside a stone room in the belly of a volcano in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation...

Fang Hui from the Spiritual Treasure Sect was standing in the middle of the room provided by the Tool Sect, examining it carefully.

In about a month, he would try to forge a Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tool in this room, which was designated for equipment forging.

By then, people from the Tool Sect would come over and make sure that he was the only one who had participated in the equipment forging process.

Only if he was able to forge a Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tool under such circumstances would the Tool Sect issue him an identity medallion establishing his status as a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger.

The people from the Tool Sect who had led him to this room had already left after offering some reminders.

At this moment, other than Fang Hui, there was another person in this equipment forging room: Wu Ji.

Wu Ji and Fang Hui were sworn friends. This event was simply too important for Fang Hui. Therefore, in order to make sure nothing went wrong during his entire equipment forging process, Wu Ji would serve as his guard and protect him until he was finished.

Fang Hui nodded after he finished examining the room. Seeing that, Wu Ji asked in a soft voice, "How likely do you think you are to succeed this time?"

"About sixty percent," Fang Hui said with a bitter smile. "I've spent the past five years gathering all of the necessary spiritual

materials for this event. If I fail this time, I don't think I'll be able to gather enough spiritual materials for the next. As you know, I've been stuck at the middle Profound realm for a long time. If I can succeed this time, it would give a strong boost to my cultivation.

"But if I fail..." With a sigh, he turned to look at Wu Ji, a complicated look filling his eyes. "If I fail, I might still be able to be acknowledged as a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger in my remaining years. But I'll never enter the Soul realm in my lifetime."

"Relax. You're gonna succeed." Wu Ji said with unmasked desolation on his face. "But my... my time is running out."

Fang Hui's expression flickered as he asked, "Didn't you manage to enter the late Profound realm half a year ago? Even though you didn't announce it, I still learned about it."

Wu Ji shook his head. "It doesn't matter. Such a minor breakthrough won't extend my lifespan. Only by entering the Soul realm will I break through my current lifespan limit. However, I've spent too long advancing from the middle Profound realm to the late Profound realm. Now, I've only got thirty years left. I can't possibly break through into the Soul realm within such a short time."

Fang Hui sighed deeply. "Thirty years..."

As a Profound realm expert himself, he was well-aware that it was an impossible task for someone to advance from the late Profound realm to the Soul realm in thirty years.

Wu Ji put on a big-hearted smile and said, "Don't feel sorry for me yet. There's still a gleam of hope... which lies with Nie Tian."

Fang Hui was shocked. "Nie Tian??"

Wu Ji nodded, but didn't give an explanation.

"That kid is indeed a miracle worker." Fang Hui recalled the time

when he had been impressed by the grown Nie Tian at the spatial rift in the Realm of Flame Heaven. “But as resourceful as he is, he can’t cheat death and give you more years, can he?!”

“Who knows,” Wu Ji said with a faint smile.

“You old goat, even if you can’t pull through this one, with those three overachieving disciples of yours, you should be able to embark upon your journey to the yellow springs with a smile on your face.” Fang Hui sounded quite envious. “Each of them turned out to be more accomplished than their senior martial brothers before them. As for this Nie Tian kid, as the inheritor chosen by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, the sky is his limit.

“But I, on the other hand, am not as lucky as you. All of my disciples have turned out to be mediocre.” He couldn’t help but sigh again.

“You still have time,” Wu Ji consoled him. “Perhaps you’ll find someone who can carry on your legacy one day. Don’t lose faith yet.”

“Do you have any idea where Nie Tian is now?” Fang Hui asked.

Wu Ji shook his head. “No. We had chances to reunite, but we missed each other every time.”

“That kid is has been through a lot,” Fang Hui said softly.

Wu Ji nodded. “Yeah, he has a lot on his shoulders.”

...

Also in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, the sectmaster of the Blood Sect, Li Jing, walked out of the inter-realm teleportation portal in Desolate City along with Shen Xiu, Yu Tong, and a few others.

The reason they had come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation was that they had received word that the remains of a seventh grade Bonebrute had been unearthed in the Realm of Unbounded

Desolation.

In ancient times, the Realm of Unbounded Desolation used to be home to the Bonebrutes.

These people from the Blood Sect had come with the intention of purchasing the Bonebrute's remains and bringing them back to the Blood Sect, so that they could turn it into a Blood Demon with their secret method.

Yu Tong, who had never been to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation before, glanced around, but all she could see were powerful Qi warriors and equipment forgers that had come from a variety of realms.

“Behave yourselves and stay out of trouble while we're in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation,” Shen Xiu reminded the juniors from her sect with a stern look on her face. “The history and strength of our sect is almost negligible when compared to the powerful sects you'll see here. This assessment assembly held by the Tool Sect will attract powerful experts from every ancient sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars. Don't you dare act on your own like you're still in the Realm of Flame Heaven.”

Every junior, including Yu Tong, nodded hastily in reply.

Shen Xiu let out deep sigh and said, “Hopefully, we'll be able to purchase the remains of that Bonebrute, bring them back to the Blood Sect, and turn them into a Bone Blood Demon of our own.”

Li Jing shot a glance at her and said, “You've got to lighten up. The fact that Nie Tian was able to awaken that Bone Blood Demon meant that we were on the right path. This time, we just need to be more patient, and perhaps we'll turn it into a brand-new Bone Blood Demon.

“On the other hand, since Nie Tian has learned and practices our Blood Refining Incantation, he should be considered an honorary member of our sect already.

“The fact that he chose to come to our sect instead of the Cloudsoaring Sect after returning to the Realm of Flame Heaven proved that he had good feelings for the Blood Sect.”

Upon hearing Nie Tian’s name, many of the Blood Sect disciples had mixed emotions on their faces.

Some were still unhappy about the fact that Nie Tian had awakened the Bonebrute, turning it into a Bone Blood Demon that would only answer his commands.

Others were grateful for him saving the Blood Sect and the Realm of Flame Heaven, hoping that he would join the Blood Sect one day and officially become a disciple of the Blood Sect.

There would be no higher honor if Nie Tian, the inheritor chosen by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, who had turned down the Heaven Palace Sect’s offer, would agree to join their Sect.

“Let’s go,” Li Jing said with a wave of her hand. “We need to find a place to stay in Desolate City first. Then we’ll wait for word of the Bonebrute’s remains.”

The crowd thus left the large-scale, inter-realm teleportation portal.

Four hours after they were gone, Nie Tian and Dong Li flashed into appearance in the same portal.

The singularly beautiful Dong Li had changed her appearance again, and resumed the face she had used in the Realm of Split Void.

Nie Tian, beside her, was wearing the mask Dong Baijie had given him as a gift.

After stepping out of the portal, Nie Tian glanced around at the forest of stone pavilions before his eyes and asked, “Are you coming with me, or staying in Desolate City?”

On their way here, Dong Li had told him almost everything about

this assessment assembly in Desolate City, which would be held by the Tool Sect in a month.

He hadn't come because of this grand event, but instead, he had come to recharge the Flame Dragon Armor with flame power.

"It's still going to be a while before the assembly opens, and I don't seem to have better things to do until then, so..." With a soft chuckle, Dong Li stretched and shot Nie Tian a glance out of the corner of her eyes, asking, "What? I'm not welcome to go with you?"

"I just don't want to waste your time," Nie Tian replied.

"But I don't have anything better to do until then." Dong Li made her stance clear again.

A tiresome expression spread across Nie Tian's face. "Be my guest then."

On their way to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, he had felt that Dong Li was going to be stuck to him the whole time they were in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. However, he didn't want to be too involved with this woman.

"You know nothing about the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. It won't be easy if you go on a search for a suitable volcano by yourself." With a disdainful snort, Dong Li muttered, "You should consider yourself lucky and learn to appreciate my kindness now that I'm willing to provide you with assistance by being your guide."

Nie Tian regretted his decisions already.

"Be a lamb and follow me." With these words, Dong Li took the initiative and strode forward.

After a moment of hesitation, Nie Tian followed along.

Under her leadership, the two of them soon walked out of Desolate City.

Upon stepping through the city gate, Nie Tian's sight was no longer blocked by the forest of stone pavilions, and he was finally able to see a large number of mountain peaks on the distant horizon.

On their way here, Dong Li had informed him that Desolate City was surrounded by quite a few volcanoes.

Only a small proportion of them had been claimed and explored by the Tool Sect for their disciples' and elders' equipment forging use.

Since the number of volcanoes near Desolate City was too great, even the Tool Sect couldn't explore and make use of all of them.

The target volcano Dong Li wanted to help Nie Tian find was one of those volcanoes that hadn't been claimed by the Tool Sect or other equipment forgers.

Chapter 435: An Old Opponent

As the two of them marched on, Dong Li told Nie Tian about the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in a low voice from time to time.

They came across three enormous, extinct volcanoes along their way.

They all belonged to the Tool Sect. It was just that, after centuries of consumption, the flame power within them had already been completely drained by Qi warriors from the Tool Sect for equipment forging.

One day passed...

As soon as Nie Tian and Song Li arrived at the foot of a short mountain peak, he sensed that the Flame Dragon Armor had grown restless.

He immediately realized that this unimpressive mountain peak contained fierce flame power in its belly.

Thus, he came to a stop.

As he examined the Flame Dragon Armor with his soul awareness, he noticed that wisps of flesh power being generated from the spirit beast meat he had consumed earlier were quietly dispersing from his abdomen into his bracelet of holding.

This feeling went on for a while...

That was when he realized that the Flame Dragon Armor had been secretly absorbing his flesh power ever since he had returned from the mysterious land.

Meanwhile, it seemed that the green aura coiled at the bottom of his heart knew nothing about it.

During this period of time, every time he replenished his flesh power with spirit beast meat, a quarter of it would quietly flow

towards the Flame Dragon Armor within his bracelet of holding.

He understood that the Flame Dragon Armor had overly consumed its strength to refine the discarnate souls and Specters within the Spirit Pearl. At this moment, it was like a dried-up well that desperately needed to be refilled with power.

What surprised him was that it didn't straightforwardly absorb flame power from his spiritual sea.

Instead, it showed a strong, almost greedy desire for his flesh power. Even though it was stored in his bracelet of holding, it was still channeling his flesh power bit by bit.

Therefore, he suspected that his flame power was merely a cup of water to a burning cart of firewood for the Flame Dragon Armor. (Idiom: an utterly inadequate measure)

The amount of flame power the Flame Dragon Armor needed would probably be an astronomical figure. Considering his current cultivation base and strength, the flame power within his spiritual sea wouldn't make even the slightest difference to the Flame Dragon Armor.

He recalled that there had been two occasions where he had witnessed the Flame Dragon Armor madly absorb flame power.

The first time had been when it had drained the flame power of every flamecloud gem in the Nie Clan's mine.

The other time had been when it had snatched torrential flame power from the mouth of the Earth Flame Beast in the lava lake deep under the Scarlet Flame Mountain Range.

The reason why he had decided to come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in search of a suitable volcano was that he knew that he knew that the fire-attributed spiritual materials in his possession were far from enough for the Flame Dragon Armor to restore itself to its normal state.

At this moment, standing at the foot of this seemingly

unimpressive volcano, he once again felt the Flame Dragon Armor's intense urging.

As Nie Tian sized up the mountain peak, which was about a thousand meters high, he noticed that people would occasionally enter and exit the numerous caves halfway up the mountain peak. "This mountain peak..."

"Don't even think about it!" Dong Li hastily stopped him. "This volcano belongs to the Tool Sect! There's still rich flame power within the belly of this volcano. The reason why it's not spewing any lava or flames is because it's being suppressed by a spell formation set up by the Tool Sect, which continuously channels the torrential lava and flames into each and every equipment forging room in those caves."

With those words, Dong Li pointed into the distance. "Those volcanoes that have smoke and flames constantly rising from them are the ones that haven't been claimed by the Tool Sect. That's where you can try to unleash your Flame Dragon Armor."

With a thought, Nie Tian suppressed the Flame Dragon Armor's urging as he looked off into the distance and said, "Man, that's far."

Dong Li sighed. "I know. If only we had an air-transportation spiritual tool of our own."

She pointed up into the sky at a crimson chariot, which had just flown out of Desolate City. "Look at those people from the Tool Sect..."

"That crimson chariot is named Rainbow Lightning, an air-transportation spiritual tool that costs five million spirit stones to forge. If we had a vehicle like that, we'd be able to arrive at our destination and find a suitable unclaimed volcano for the Flame Dragon Armor within hours."

Upon hearing Dong Li talk about air-transportation spiritual

tools, Nie Tian sighed inwardly, thinking that their journey would have been much easier if he had gotten the air-transportation spiritual tool left by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace out of the mountain peak in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations.

Having an air-transportation spiritual tool, the speed at which they traveled would be enhanced by at least a dozen times.

Instead of spending a month traveling from the “Phantasm relic” in the Realm of Dark Underworld to the inter-realm teleportation portal, they would have only needed a day or two.

“Hmm?!” He exclaimed as he watched the Rainbow Lightning whizz by over their heads, a strange look appearing in his eyes.

He saw an acquaintance on the Rainbow Lightning: Wu Ling.

During the Heaven Gate trial, he had once fought him in the Lesser Heaven section in the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace.

His high battle prowess, fancy spiritual armor, and his unique, devilish saber had all left a deep impression on him.

The reason he had defeated Wu Ling back then was that he had been able to create powerful spiritual energy balls with the incomparably rich spiritual Qi in the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, and used them to attack him, along with his other battle techniques.

Just now, he saw with great clarity that Wu Ling was standing at the front of the Rainbow Lightning, dressed in a black garment with a grave expression on his face.

The other few males and females, who were also dressed in the Tool Sect’s garments, seemed to be trying to play up to him. However, he simply ignored them.

“What’s wrong?” Dong Li asked.

Nie Tian frowned slightly. “I just saw an acquaintance.”

Dong Li was taken aback. “An acquaintance?! Those who just

passed over us seemed to be members of the Tool Sect, but since they were moving so fast, I didn't get a clear view of them. So who was it?"

"Wu Ling, who I fought once during the Heaven Gate trial," Nie Tian answered.

Dong Li's expression flickered. "Wu Ling!"

Nie Tian was surprised by her reaction. "Do you know who he is?"

"Of course!" Dong Li nodded. "That guy has a very special background. His mother is a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger, while his father... is even more legendary. Since Wu Ling's cultivation attribute isn't fire, he didn't inherit his mother's equipment forging attainments. Also, it wasn't his dream to become an equipment forger.

"Therefore, he went on the same path his father had taken: the path to ultimate power.

"As far as I know, he could have advanced to the Heaven stage before the Heaven Gate trial started. But in order to gain an edge in the trial, he forcibly halted his cultivation progress, so that he would have a better chance at obtaining a fragmentary star mark as a Lesser Heaven stage cultivator. However, he ran into you, and thus returned in defeat and frustration.

"But after his return from the Heaven Gate trial, he made several consecutive breakthroughs in the past few years, and successfully entered the Greater Heaven stage, which was miraculous.

"Furthermore, I heard that he's on the verge of another breakthrough now."

A rare frustrated expression appeared on Dong Li's face as she watched the Rainbow Lightning disappear into the distant horizon. "He's got such a special background and amazing cultivation talent. Meanwhile, the Tool Sect goes all-out to

cultivate him. I bet it won't be long before he makes another breakthrough and enters the middle Greater Heaven stage."

A grim expression spread out on Nie Tian's face as he muttered, "Three years... from the Lesser Heaven stage to the Greater Heaven stage..."

Dong Li suddenly came to her senses. She jerked her head to look at him and said, "Of course, compared to him, your advancement in cultivation is even more monstrous! You practice power of various attributes simultaneously, yet you also managed to advance from the Lesser Heaven stage to the Greater Heaven stage in three years. If Wu Ling learns that you've also entered the Greater Heaven stage, I bet he'd be more shocked than you are."

"That guy..." Nie Tian took a deep breath. "I hope I don't encounter him while I'm in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation."

Dong Li nodded. "For sure. You defeated him and took his fragmentary star mark. That guy doesn't have a big heart like my brother. He won't forget what you've done to him."

"During the Heaven Gate trial, I exerted all my power and used a talisman my master had given me, and even then I only won by a narrow margin," Nie Tian said. "In order to get out alive, he severed his own hand. And I shattered that hand to secure the first fragmentary star mark."

"I see..." Dong Li said with a shocked expression on her face. "No wonder he always wears a glove on his left hand. I thought he was trying to hide something."

Nie Tian was surprised. "A glove?"

Just now, when the Rainbow Lightning flashed by, he had only seen Wu Ling's face, not his hands.

"Yeah, ever since he returned from the Heaven Gate trial, he's been wearing a black glove on his left hand, and no one has ever seen him take it off." After a moment of pondering, Dong Li added,

“Although, reattaching people’s limbs isn’t an impossible task for the mighty Tool Sect. It’s hard to say whether he’ll have a new hand the next time you see him.

“Of course, it can either be grown for him or taken from other things.

“It’s even possible that his new hand will turn out to be even stronger than the original one.

“Anyways, we’d better stay away from him. Otherwise, it will cause us a lot of trouble.”

With a grim face, Nie Tian nodded. “I’ll try to avoid him.”

Chapter 436: A Close Miss

As Nie Tian and Dong Li marched towards the volcanoes that hadn't been claimed by the Tool Sect, they would often see the Rainbow Lightning flash past over their heads.

Those who stood on it were mostly people from the Tool Sect. They traveled back and forth between Desolate City and the numerous volcanoes, as if they were on some kind of mission.

Nie Tian envied them inwardly for having access to the Rainbow Lightning, and imagined that one day he would be strong enough to get the air-transportation spiritual tool left by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace out of the mountain peak in the Realm of a Thousand Devastations.

During the first few days of their journey, every volcano Nie Tian and Dong Li came across had been occupied and was guarded by people from the Tool Sect.

Equipment forging rooms had been established in each and every volcano.

After the first few days, even though the volcanoes they came across were also guarded by people from the Tool Sect, many of the equipment forgers who worked there seemed to be from other sects.

Dong Li explained to him, "Powerful equipment forgers from the other realms come here to forge high grade spiritual tools, sometimes even Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tools.

"For example, Fang Hui from the Realm of Flame Heaven will need to forge a Spirit Channeling grade treasure under the Tool Sect's supervision in order for him to be acknowledged as a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger.

"Equipment forgers like him will need to have a volcano to themselves, so that their needs for an endless supply of flame

power will be met.

“Before the assessment assembly starts, people from the Tool Sect will show them to different equipment forging rooms in different volcanoes, where they will make preparations and make sure the cultivation rooms they are allotted meet their needs.”

Nie Tian nodded, showing that he understood.

Over the past few days, even though he didn't unleash his nine Heaven Eyes, he was able to sense the auras on the foreign equipment forgers in the volcanoes he passed, and learned that every single one of them possessed an extraordinary cultivation base.

Therefore, he speculated that all of those foreign equipment forgers had come here to advance to the Spirit Channeling grade.

“No more than twenty percent of them will be able to actually forge a Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tool,” Dong Li said with a sarcastic tone. “Most of them are only here to try their luck and squander their time.”

“It's that difficult?” Nie Tian seemed surprised.

“Of course!” Dong Li snorted disdainfully. “Do you think Spirit Channeling grade treasures are easy to make? As far as I know, there are only about a dozen certified Spirit Channeling grade equipment forgers throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars. The Tool Sect's assessment assembly is held every ten years. There have been many times where not a single equipment forger could advance to the Spirit Channeling grade.”

As they spoke, Nie Tian found himself standing by the foot of another high volcano.

He looked up and saw a sizable cave halfway up the mountain, and beside the mouth of the cave sat two equipment forgers from the Tool Sect, as if they were waiting for something.

After a quick glance, he withdrew his gaze and moved on under

Dong Li's urging.

Soon after they were gone, Fang Hui and Wu Ji stepped out of the cave.

Fang Hui nodded at one of the Tool Sect members, accepting his arrangement. "Everything seems fine. This is it. I'll take this volcano and this equipment forging room."

"Good luck to you then. We'll come over when the assessment assembly starts." With these words, the two Tool Sect members turned around and left.

Fang Hui and Wu Ji stood by the mouth of the cave and watched them leave.

"Have you ever heard of Fruits of Life?" Fang Hui asked.

Wu Ji's eyebrows rose as he nodded. "I sure have."

Fang Hui took his time and said, "Rumor had it that your disciple Nie Tian consumed a Fruit of Life during the Heaven Gate trial. Thanks to that, his lifespan has been greatly prolonged. It was also by relying on the rich life force within that Fruit of Life that he was able to awaken that Bone Blood Demon in the Blood Sect."

A chuckle escaped Wu Ji's mouth as he said, "Nie Tian being able to awaken that Bone Blood Demon probably had nothing to do with him consuming any Fruits of Life."

Like Hua Mu, he was one of the few people in this world who knew about Nie Tian's special bloodline.

He was well-aware that the fact that Nie Tian had been able to vest the Bone Blood Demon with life force and awaken it had nothing to do with any Fruit of Life. It was all because of his unique bloodline.

"Oh, okay..." Fang Hui seemed to have faith his judgment. "But Fruits of Life do exist. Also, they seem to have appeared in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation before."

Gazing off into the distance at the numerous lava-spewing volcanoes, he added, “The weather and landforms of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation are quite unique. As the former habitat of Bonebrutes, it’s dry, desolate, and filled with active volcanoes. Normally speaking, it’s not likely for Fruits of Life to appear in such a place.

“However, many things in this world are more complicated and profound than we can ever imagine, and they can’t be explained with logic.

“It’s said that somewhere in this desolate and lifeless land exists a miraculous place where the wood power is so extremely rich that it could produce Fruits of Life.

“How about I go look around with you after the assessment assembly is over?”

Wu Ji shook his head. “Forget it. I’ve heard that rumor too. As a matter of fact, this is my seventh visit to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. All six times before this, I had come in pursuit of that rumor. I’ve practically covered the entire Realm of Unbounded Desolation, but still failed to find that promised place where wood power is almost thick as water.

“Even the Tool Sect, which is rooted in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, hasn’t been able to find it. How can we?”

Upon hearing his words, Fang Hui could only sigh deeply.

“That magical place does exist somewhere in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Of that, I’m sure.” At that moment, the figure of a person flashed into appearance at the mouth of the cave.

It was Hua Mu.

Upon seeing him, Wu Ji’s expression flickered dramatically. “It’s you?! Why are you here?”

Several years ago, when Nie Tian had suddenly vanished from the Realm of Flame Heaven, Hua Mu had secretly visited Wu Ji in

the Cloudsoaring Sect.

The two of them had talked briefly.

Back then, Wu Ji hadn't been able to see through Hua Mu, nor had he known that Hua Mu had secretly protected and helped Nie Tian more than a few times.

Now, even though Wu Ji had broken through into the late Profound realm, he still couldn't determine Hua Mu's actual cultivation base or identity.

"Mr. Fang, if you don't mind, can I have a moment with Mr. Wu?" Hua Mu asked with a smile.

Fang Hui had seen Hua Mu once at the major spatial rift in the Realm of Flame Heaven. He could tell that this unfathomable man had been on Nie Tian's side and was secretly protecting Nie Tian.

"Of course." With a nod, Fang Hui leaped away from the mouth of the cave and down towards the foot of the mountain.

Hua Mu followed Wu Ji into the equipment forging room the Tool Sect had prepared for Fang Hui.

"I'm gonna be honest with you, Mr. Wu. You and I are facing the same problem." A bitter smile appeared on Hua Mu's face. "The lifespan problem."

"That's what I suspected," Wu Ji said in a low voice.

Hua Mu's expression grew serious as he said, "It's not a rumor that Fruits of Life have appeared in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. It's a fact. That miraculous place does exist somewhere in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. It's just that normal people can't perceive its existence, and thus can't find it."

Wu Ji's eyes lit up. "Have you also looked for it?"

"Yes, I have." Hua Mu let out a sigh. "But just like you, I also failed to find anything, not a single spider's web or horse's footprint. (idiom: not a clue)."

“Then why are you here?” Wu Ji asked.

“You and I both know how unique Nie Tian is. He carries a mysterious bloodline, which... is what we need.” After a moment of pondering, he continued, “The way I see it, if anyone possesses the unique ability to perceive and locate that miraculous place in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, Nie Tian should be one of them.”

Wu Ji pondered a while in silence before he exclaimed, “Are you saying that his bloodline power would allow him to find that place?”

“I’m not completely certain, but I think that’s very likely.” Hua Mu suddenly began to seem rather hesitant. After a moment of hesitation, he added, “But I’ve lost contact with the boy, and have no idea where he is now. The latest word I’ve received indicates that he has gone to explore a Phantasm relic in the Realm of Dark Underworld with a group of juniors from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.

“Later, he seemed to have been chased away by a mysterious object of the Phantasms, and has vanished since then.

“I’m not sure if he’s still alive. But if he is, he’ll probably visit you someday.”

Wu Ji was flabbergasted. “Nie Tian is in danger?”

“Not necessarily. All we know is that he’s gone missing.” Hua Mu sighed. “He shoulders our hope. I don’t ever want bad things to happen to him. The way I see it, he’s probably still alive, and he might go to visit you in the Cloudsoaring Sect in the future. So please let me know if you ever see him or receive word of him.

“From what I’ve learned, the miraculous place that could breed Fruits of Life might appear again soon.

“If you see him, please bring him to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. We’ll help him search for that place together, and

hopefully we'll get to find Fruits of Life."

Wu Ji fixed his deep eyes on him for a while before asking, "You're also nearing the end of your lifespan, aren't you?"

A bitter smile spread out on Hua Mu's face.

Chapter 437: Not Even A Blade of Grass

Days passed...

Nie Tian and Dong Li passed numerous volcanoes and came across quite a number of equipment forgers.

Gradually, the volcanoes they passed along their way were no longer occupied and guarded by people from the Tool Sect.

However, foreign equipment forgers could be seen wandering around them. Knowing that loud noises might occur when the Flame Dragon Armor started absorbing flame power from the heart of a volcano, Nie Tian decided to be patient and march further.

Two weeks passed.

The two of them finally arrived in a region rarely visited by people. Under the scorching sun, thick smoke was rising from a nearby volcano as burning lava spewed out of its top.

Rivers of lava streamed down the mountain and slowly flowed in every direction.

The two of them followed one of the rivers of lava to the foot of the mountain. Without any hesitation, Nie Tian condensed and unleashed his nine Heaven Eyes.

They spread out in the air and started scanning the vicinity for signs of life.

Standing beside him, Dong Li dabbed sweat from her forehead from time to time, cursing the unbearable heat in this place.

Dong Li, who was wearing a few layers, had to take off her cape, revealing her curvaceous physique.

Dressed in nothing but a thin, faint, cyan, short suit, her alluring body was now fully displayed.

Even though she had assumed a less charming face, her perfect

curves alone were enough to bewitch any man.

Exposed to the fierce sunlight, she had long since been covered in sweat. Even the handkerchief she used to dab her face had become soaking wet.

“What do you think of this one?” She asked, looking at Nie Tian.

Eyes narrowed, Nie Tian was still examining the vicinity with his nine Heaven Eyes.

After withdrawing them, Nie Tian gazed at the short mountain and said, “Alright, it seems that there aren’t any fluctuations of life aura in the vicinity. This is it then.”

The volcano was only several hundred meters high. Not the least bit of vegetation could be seen on it.

In fact, they hadn’t spotted a single plant their whole way here.

“What’s the matter with this place?” Nie Tian asked. “Why didn’t we see any vegetation even after marching for so long?”

Dong Li had already taken out a folding fan. Fanning herself, she said with a tiresome expression on her face, “Originally, this realm belonged to the Bonebrutes. After the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace descended upon the Domain of the Falling Stars, the Bonebrutes suffered crushing defeats. Those that weren’t killed fled. As thousands of years passed, this realm gradually developed into a paradise for human equipment forgers.

“The weather here has always been like this; not even a blade of grass can be seen in most places. This was also true when the Bonebrutes still ruled it.

“However, there’s a fascinating rumor about the strange environment in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

Dong Li intentionally mystified what she was about to tell him.

Intrigued, Nie Tian asked, “What rumor?”

Dong Li pursed her lips into a smile and said, “It’s said that the

reason why not even a blade of grass can be seen in most places is because somewhere in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation exists a wondrous place where the wood power is almost as rich and concentrated as water. It's because that wondrous place absorbs all of the wood power that the Realm of Unbounded Desolation is so barren."

"Does that place really exist?" Nie Tian seemed very skeptical.

"I don't know either. But that rumor has been around for many, many years. It's also said that Fruits of Life grow there." It seemed that Dong Li didn't quite believe the rumor either. She curled her lips and continued, "For hundreds of years, countless cultivators have come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to try their luck when their time was running out, hoping to find that magical place where Fruits of Life grow.

"However, until this day, no one seems to have actually found the place and secured any Fruits of Life."

Nie Tian shook his head and said, "If there really is such a place, the Tool Sect would have done something about it already."

"Yeah, that's why it's just a rumor," Dong Li said.

With that, Nie Tian cast the rumor about the magical place and Fruits of Life out of his mind and said, "Alright, I'm ready to unleash the Flame Dragon Armor."

Dong Li nodded. "Okay."

Convinced that no one was in the vicinity, Nie Tian summoned the Flame Dragon Armor from within his bracelet of holding.

The Flame Dragon Armor whooshed out. Like a streak of flames, it shot directly towards the lava-spewing volcano.

Standing at the foot of the mountain, Nie Tian and Dong Li watched with great clarity as the Flame Dragon Armor dove into the mouth of the volcano.

Even though there was a significant distance between Nie Tian and the Flame Dragon Armor, he could sense, by relying on the subtle connection between them, that the Flame Dragon Armor was cheering.

That was when he realized that he had made the right decision by coming to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to find an active volcano for the Flame Dragon Armor.

He let out a sigh of relief, knowing that the Flame Dragon Armor had entered the heart of the volcano, where no life could ever reach, and started absorbing fierce flame power.

Finally relaxed, Nie Tian turned to look at Dong Li and said, "Half a month has passed."

As he did, his eyes couldn't help but linger a few seconds on Dong Li's ample chest. "The Tool Sect's assessment assembly is opening soon. If you go back now, following the route we've taken to get here, you can still catch it. So do you want to go back to Desolate City or do you want to stay here?"

With chuckle, Dong Li stretched, highlighting the curves of her breasts and making them mind-stirring, although it was impossible to know whether or not she was doing it deliberately.

Nie Tian, who was waiting for her answer, was once again attracted; his gaze involuntarily lowered and fixated on them.

Dong Li's face was full of smiles as she said, "Do you still remember what I told you in the Realm of Dark Underworld?"

"Told me what?" Nie Tian asked.

Eyes glittering with a bewildering light, Dong Li started leaning towards Nie Tian. "That if you go all-out to help me during our trip in the Realm of Dark Underworld, I'll let you get intimate with me."

Only when her ample breasts, which her garment seemed to be failing to contain, were about to touch Nie Tian's chest did she

stop.

Gazing directly into Nie Tian's eyes, she said with an extremely soft and tempting tone, "I'm rather satisfied with your performance during our trip in the Realm of Dark Underworld. My word is still good. Do you wanna...?"

Looking down at Dong Li's full bosom, which was only a finger's breadth away from touching his chest, Nie Tian felt as if an insuppressible fire was burning inside of him.

He immediately started feeling dry-mouthed.

"What? Are you scared?" Dong Li chuckled. "You seemed rather bold when we were in the dense forest."

Provoked, Nie Tian grinned as he suddenly stuck out his chest.

However, the contact he expected didn't occur, since the moment he stuck out his chest, Dong Li took a step backwards, putting some space between them.

Nie Tian stared at her, discontent filling his eyes.

Dong Li gazed back at him with a flirtatious look on her face. Then, she said with a taunting and pretentious tone, "I thought you'd changed, but who would have guessed that you're still the lecher you are! Do you really think you've won my heart and I'm ready to give myself to you? Quit dreaming! I'm just having fun with you!"

Nie Tian didn't seem to be very embarrassed. Scratching his nose, he said, "Thank you for taking me here. You shouldn't waste more of your time with me. You should return to Desolate City and observe the Tool Sect's assessment assembly."

Dong Li pursed her lips into a smile. "What? Getting angry?"

A tiresome expression spread across Nie Tian's face. "No, I just don't think you should continue to waste your time by staying here with me."

“I like it here,” Dong Li said with a cold snort. “What I do is none of your business. I’m not an equipment forger. Why would the Tool Sect’s assessment assembly concern me?”

“Suit yourself then.” Nie Tian turned his back on her.

Dong Li actually stayed by Nie Tian’s side over the next two days. Thick-skinned, she taunted and teased Nie Tian from time to time, as if she enjoyed it very much.

One night.

Nie Tian curled up in the cave he had opened in the mountain, where he waited for the Flame Dragon Armor to absorb flame power while putting up with Dong Li’s constant teasing. All of a sudden, his eyebrows furrowed as he said, “Two men are coming towards us.”

Dong Li quit messing around and asked, “Who are they?”

“I don’t know, but they don’t seem to be from the Tool Sect,” Nie Tian answered.

A quarter hour later, the two men stopped at the foot of the volcano. One of them, who was a Premium grade equipment forger, discovered the cave created by Nie Tian and Dong Li and said with a frown, “I can’t believe that such a remote volcano is also occupied. Come on. Let’s go find another one, Lu Shen.”

The other man unleashed his psychic awareness. After a brief scan, he said, “That won’t be necessary. It’s just a couple of early Greater Heaven stage lovers. Who knows what kind of things they are doing here. I’ll drive them away.”

With those words, he dashed towards the cave where Dong Li and Nie Tian were, while shouting, “Get the hell out of there!”

Nie Tian’s face fell.

Dong Li, however, smiled as she asked in a low voice, “Is your Flame Dragon Armor still absorbing flame power in the heart of

this volcano?”

“Yeah,” Nie Tian answered.

Dong Li’s bright eyes glittered as she said, “Good. Let me handle this. Don’t say a word.”

“Okay...”

Chapter 438: Patience

Nie Tian had no idea what Dong Li was up to.

“It’s gonna be awhile before the Flame Dragon Armor finishes, right? Since we don’t have anything to do during this time, we might as well have some fun with them.” With these words, Dong Li walked out of the cave.

Nie Tian followed along.

As soon as he stepped out of the cave, he saw Lu Shen swiftly flashing about along a stone path and rapidly approaching where they were.

His nine Heaven Eyes were currently floating in the vicinity, covering the areas around the volcano.

He had perceived Lu Shen’s cultivation base the moment he showed up: the late Greater Heaven stage.

Even though he hadn’t engaged in any battles with others yet after entering the Greater Heaven stage, he was convinced that his battle prowess had gone through a drastic improvement.

He had dared to fight Greater Heaven stage Qi warriors when he had been at the Heaven stage, and even gained the upper-hand in most occasions.

Now that he had entered the Greater Heaven stage, he didn’t feel the slightest fear facing a man like Lu Shen.

He was also aware that the battle prowess of Dong Li, who was also at the early Greater Heaven stage and possessed the spirit of a black phoenix, was probably also higher than Lu Shen’s.

As for Lu Shen’s friend, who was still at the foot of the mountain, he was just an equipment forger at the middle Greater Heaven stage.

Considering Dong Li’s and his true strength and battle prowess,

they were probably able to defeat Lu Shen and the other man in a battle.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Lu Shen arrived in front of them, at the mouth of the cave. With a grin, he said, “Thank you for creating this cave for us. I believe it will suit Master Jiang’s equipment forging needs. Now, you can get lost.”

Lu Shen, from the Realm of Earth Sieve, had come here to hire a seasoned equipment forger to customize a spiritual tool for him, now that many equipment forgers were here to take part in the Tool Sect’s assessment assembly.

Jiang Bo was the equipment forger he had hired from Desolate City.

As a Premium grade equipment forger, Jiang Bo hadn’t come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to participate in the assessment assembly.

Rather, he had come with a friend who, just like Li Ye, was hoping to be assessed as a Premium grade equipment forger this time.

Lu Shen and Jiang Bo had reached an agreement, according to which Lu Shen would gather the necessary materials and pay Jiang Bo fifty thousand spirit stones as an equipment forging fee.

In fact, flames from the earth’s core weren’t necessary when forging Premium grade spiritual tools. It was because Lu Shen wanted to raise the success rate that he had demanded Jiang Bo come this far with him in search of a unoccupied volcano. After all, he didn’t want the precious spiritual materials he had gone to great lengths to gather to go to waste.

Since the Tool Sect’s assessment assembly was around the corner, many of the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation had already been occupied by foreign equipment

forgers.

The two of them had taken a long journey to this remote and desolate area, and rapidly set their minds on the very volcano where the Flame Dragon Armor was absorbing flame power from the earth's core.

After a brief scan from the foot of the mountain, Lu Shen, who was at the late Greater Heaven stage, discovered that Dong Li and Nie Tian were only at the early Greater Heaven stage. Therefore, he didn't intend to let go of this volcano and go find another one.

A shocked and scared expression appeared on Dong Li's face. Nodding, she dragged Nie Tian away by the arm and said, "Oh, so a master needs this volcano for equipment forging. It's all good. We're leaving."

A puzzled expression spread across Nie Tian's face.

Lu Shen laughed. "Mmm... smart choice."

His gaze spent only a second on Dong Li's disguised face before roaming down to her ample chest.

Then, his gaze roamed Dong Li's whole body, her full chest, thin waist, and slender legs. Eyes glittering with pure lust, he thought to himself, "This woman has ordinary looks, but her body is such a gift from god..."

Nie Tian frowned slightly.

Watching Lu Shen's impudent gaze roam all over Dong Li's body, he felt very uncomfortable.

However, before he could do something about it, Dong Li dragged him away, saying, "We're leaving right now."

With these words, Dong Li pulled Nie Tian down the mountain.

Watching her leave from behind, Lu Shen's heated gaze fixated on Dong Li's perfectly curvy buttocks, which jiggled as she leaped down towards the foot of the mountain.

“God damn!” He swallowed his saliva.

In order to let Jiang Bo forge a suitable spiritual tool for him, he forcibly suppressed his urges.

Moments later, Dong Li and Nie Tian arrived at the foot of the mountain.

As soon as the equipment forger named Jiang Bo caught sight of Dong Li, who had been driven down the mountain by Lu Shen, his eyes lit up. The look in his eyes became even more lusty and greedy than Lu Shen’s.

As a matter of fact, the reason why Jiang Bo had agreed to work for Lu Shen was that the two of them shared the same vulgar interest.

In order to bring Jiang Bo on board, Lu Shen had treated Jiang Bo to many brothels in Desolate City. Only after that had Jiang Bo finally agreed to work with him.

Dong Li only nodded briefly at Jiang Bo at the foot of the mountain before dragging Nie Tian away.

Not saying a word, Jiang Bo rushed up the mountain to the cave Dong Li and Nie Tian had created, where he said to Lu Shen, “I’ll bring out my best to forge this spiritual tool for you. But I’ll probably be rather exhausted afterwards, and need a little entertainment...”

He shot a glance at Dong Li, who was dragging Nie Tian away into the distance.

Lu Shen immediately understood what he meant. With a chuckle, he said, “Don’t worry, master. You just go ahead and start. I’ll have that woman ready for you when you’re finished.”

Jiang Bo nodded with a wicked smile. Saying no more, he went into the cave and started making preparations.

Standing by the mouth of the cave halfway up the mountain, Lu

Shen squinted as he gazed off into the distance at Nie Tian and Dong Li, who were going farther and farther away.

The entire area around this volcano was desolate and uninhabited. Dong Li and Nie Tian had been the only people he had encountered in days. Therefore, it wouldn't be hard for him to locate them in this area.

Furthermore, as they marched deeper into the barren land, they would find streams of burning lava taking up a larger proportion of the land. Even if they could still march forward, their speed would become incomparably slow.

Therefore, Lu Shen didn't seem worried at all. He waited patiently as Jiang Bo made preparations. He planned to make his move after Jiang Bo completely devoted himself to the equipment forging process.

Meanwhile, Dong Li and Nie Tian left Lu Shen's sight.

After coming to a stop by a stream of flowing lava, Dong Li turned around to gaze at the distant volcano. She gave a cold harrumph and said, "Morons who seek death!"

"We could have fought them and won, you know," Nie Tian said.

Dong Li smiled at him and said, "Sure. Considering our actual strength and battle prowess, we can probably take them in a battle. But after all, they are at the middle and late Greater Heaven stage. If we had fought them head-on the moment we met, it wouldn't have been an easy victory.

"However, if we wait a while, once that equipment forger starts his equipment forging process, he won't want to stop midway.

"If he does, all his effort and the materials will go to waste.

"While he's forging that spiritual tool, the other guy might come for us, or hole up somewhere and wait for us to return.

"Either way, the situation will be in our favor."

With these words, Dong Li's eyes became filled with ferocity, yet she said calmly, "Those morons wanted to drive us away and take that volcano for themselves when your Flame Dragon Armor was still in the belly of that volcano. So I decided not to let them live the moment that guy came up to the cave. If we spare their lives, they might see your Flame Dragon Armor when it finishes absorbing flame power and flies out of the mouth of the volcano."

"If they had chosen to leave after realizing we were there, I would have let them go."

"But it was their fault for bullying those with lower cultivation bases and forcibly taking the volcano where your Flame Dragon Armor was, so I have to silence them. They gave me no choice."

Nie Tian was taken aback. "You decided to kill them the moment that guy went up the mountain?"

"That's right." Dong Li said, sounding as if it couldn't be more natural.

Nie Tian thought to himself, "No wonder she named her group the Fang."

Chapter 439: Ill-fated Seeker

In the cave halfway up the mountain...

As a Premium grade equipment forger, Jiang Bo summoned an object that looked like an awl.

In the next moment, it pierced into the rocky end of the cave and started rapidly digging down towards the heart of the volcano.

It wasn't very long before it returned, followed by blazing flames and lava.

Rather calmly, Jiang Bo took out a huge bronze cauldron and placed it under the hole where flames and lava were about to rush out. At the same time, he cast exquisite fire incantations to refine the pouring lava and extract the earthflame essence from within, which he would later use to forge a spiritual tool.

Afterwards, he picked out spiritual materials from the big pile of spiritual materials beside him and tossed them into the cauldron in a certain order.

As Jiang Bo formed one hand seal after another, glowing spheres of light slammed into the cauldron's surface.

The numerous fiery patterns on its surface lit up as the spiritual materials within it were gradually melted by the earthflame essence.

At the mouth of the cave.

The late Greater Heaven stage Lu Shen was gazing off in the direction Nie Tian and Dong Li had left in as he waited patiently.

He could still perceive Dong Li and Nie Tian's existences, which meant they had stopped in a location not far from him. Considering they were still within the range of his psychic awareness, he believed that, once he was ready to make his move, he would be able to catch them within a short time.

He occasionally turned around to look at Jiang Bo, who was making preparations with the numerous spiritual materials he had gathered for this event.

Even though Nie Tian and Dong Li were still within his perception range, and everything seemed to be going as he had expected, he didn't want to make his move so early, lest Jiang Bo get distracted and ruin his work.

Meanwhile...

Nie Tian was sitting on a crimson rock by a river of flowing lava. He took out some of the spirit beast meat he had purchased in the Dong Clan, cooked it with the flames in the river of burning lava, and shared it with Dong Li.

As he did, he closed his eyes to sense what was going on with the Flame Dragon Armor by relying on the profound connection between it and him.

He could sense that the Flame Dragon Armor was absorbing flame power from the heart of the volcano, where the lava was the most fierce.

Moments later, the spirit beast meat he had consumed started to generate wisps of flesh power, which slowly flowed towards every corner of his body.

However, the green aura coiled up in his heart suddenly grew restless, and started madly absorbing the flesh power.

Every wisp of flesh power was pulled into Nie Tian's heart the moment it rose from his stomach, and soon became a part of the green aura.

When the green aura had devoured all of the freshly-generated flesh power, it didn't return to its dormant state.

Surprised, Nie Tian examined it with rapt attention.

The green aura consisted of three layers. The outermost layer

was a misty, green aura, inside of which were numerous crystal-like chains. Inside of the crystal-like chains were countless shiny, green spots, which seemed to be branded with the profound truths of his bloodline.

At this moment, the shiny, green spots in some of the crystal-like chains were flickering.

“Hmm?!” he was surprised.

As he recalled, only when the green aura had gathered enough flesh power and gone through a period of dormancy would the green spots in those crystal-like chains start shining brightly, and that was usually when he was ready to awaken a new bloodline talent.

However at this moment, he felt that the green aura hadn't gathered enough flesh power, and that it shouldn't have reached the point where it was ready to transcend again yet.

Furthermore, the green spots within those few crystal-like chains were only flickering, not shining dazzlingly, which was another sign that he wasn't ready to develop a new bloodline talent yet.

The strange phenomenon didn't last long. Soon, the few crystal-like chains stopped flickering and went silent.

Everything resumed its original state.

Nie Tian didn't give the incident too much thought. He occasionally sensed the situation with the Flame Dragon Armor while practicing cultivation.

Time flew. Two days passed.

Lu Shen and Jiang Bo were still at the volcano. Everything seemed fine.

Dong Li, who was sitting on a rock next to Nie Tian, let out a snort and said, “That guy is quite patient. I guess he can tell that we didn't go far, and assumes that we're like apples in his hand

that he can grab and eat whenever he wants. That's probably why he's still waiting. However, it's about time we went back. I bet the equipment forger has already started the equipment forging process.

"He will have to protect that equipment forger and make sure the equipment forging process goes uninterrupted. Those obligations will definitely hold him back in battle.

"Let's attack him together and finish him off as quickly as possible so that we can put an end to this trouble. Also, if he escapes and runs, it will be hard to say if we can still catch him, and he might even see the Flame Dragon Armor."

Nie Tian nodded. "Alright."

Just as they were about to set out, Nie Tian noticed via one of his Heaven Eyes that an old man had entered the area.

The old man followed the path he and Dong Li had taken to the foot of the short volcano.

The old man was also at the late Greater Heaven stage, though he looked much older than Lu Shen. His face was gray and gloomy; his eyes seemed to be filled with a faint aura of death.

Standing at the foot of the mountain, he gazed up at the cave halfway up the mountain.

Lu Shen gazed coldly down at him.

After a brief eye contact, the old man let out a sigh and marched on.

It wasn't long before he appeared in front of Nie Tian and Dong Li.

"Young friends, have you sensed the existence of a place where wood power is extremely rich in this area?" The old man asked in a soft voice.

With a single glance at him, Dong Li seemed to learn his situation

and intentions. She shook her head and said, “No. I think you should go back. You’re wasting your time chasing something that doesn’t exist. You might as well go do the things you’ve always wanted to do but never had the chance to do, and then wait for death in peace.”

A bitter smile appeared on the old man’s face as he muttered, “That’s not enough... I’ve heard that people have sensed the existence of intense wood power in areas far from Desolate City. I’ve got to give it a shot.”

With these words, he bid farewell to Nie Tian and Dong Li, and marched on with a numb expression on his face. He looked very sad and lonely from behind.

Watching him going farther and farther away, Dong Li said, “The same rumor comes out every once in a while. I heard it the first time I came to Desolate City. People said they had sensed intense wood power, but the sensation was gone in the next moment. However, the locations where they said they had sensed the intense wood power were very different.”

Nie Tian sighed. “The man doesn’t have many years left.”

The moment he had seen the old man, he could tell that he was nearing his end.

He only had two options: either break the shackles on his cultivation path and enter the Worldly realm, or have someone extend his lifespan for him. Otherwise, he could only wait for death.

Compared to outsider races, humans were greatly disadvantaged as far as lifespan was concerned.

Many outsider races were born with thousands of years of lifespan or even more. Not only that, as their bloodline power was upgraded, their lifespan would extend even further.

Most of the outsider races wouldn’t need to worry about their

lifespan. All they needed to do was practice cultivation and upgrade their bloodline power at a pace they felt comfortable with.

Humans, however, had far shorter lifespans, so they would have to make constant breakthroughs in their cultivation in order to prolong them.

Hua Mu and his master, Wu Ji, faced the same problem as the old man who had just left — They were all nearing the end of their lifespan.

“You’re right. I’ve seen too many people in the same situation as him.” Dong Li sounded indifferent. “Many Qi warriors have poor cultivation talent, or come from humble backgrounds. Without powerful sects or clans to support them, and without favorable encounters, they can only progress slowly on their cultivation path.

“One day, they realize that the speed at which they make breakthroughs in their cultivation can’t keep up with the speed at which they’re growing older. Eventually, they die in frustration.

“That old man practices two types of power at the same time: wood power and earth power.

“The more types of power he practices, the slower his cultivation will progress. Therefore, it can’t be more natural that he can’t make another breakthrough and enter the Worldly realm before his time is up.”

With these words, Dong Li looked deeply at him and continued, “You’re so much luckier than him, considering that you practice three types of power.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Yeah.”

What he didn’t tell Dong Li was that even if he hadn’t experienced those incredible encounters, which had caused him to rapidly advance in his cultivation, he probably still wouldn’t have a lifespan problem.

He seemed to have been born with a unique bloodline that granted him a lifespan longer than that of an ordinary human.

He had a feeling that even if he hadn't become a Qi warrior, but rather squandered his years, he probably would still be able to live a thousand years or even longer.

“That moron has run out of patience!” Dong Li called out with a sneer. “He saw people coming to this area and thus feared that others might come as well. He's finally coming for us.”

Nie Tian looked off into the distance, and saw a figure flashing down the volcano.

RUUUUMBLE!

At the same time, a loud rumble echoed out from the depths of the very volcano that Jiang Bo was using to forge a spiritual tool.

Chapter 440: Gathering Discarnate Souls

The loud rumble caused the earth to tremble continuously. Even the old man, who was already quite far away from the volcano, came to a stop upon hearing the rumble, standing on ground that had been cut into pieces by numerous rivers of lava.

He turned around to shoot a curious gaze towards the shaking volcano before casting a secret magic to examine his surroundings.

After realizing that no noteworthy wood power had appeared in the vicinity, he shook his head and marched on again.

He knew that he only had about five years left now. The reason why he had come such a long way from the Realm of Black Marsh to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation was because he had placed all of his hopes in the legend, hoping that he would be able to find that promised land, where he would obtain a Fruit of Life and thus extend his lifespan.

Anything that didn't concern this meant nothing to him.

Back when he had passed the short volcano, he had noticed that Lu Shen's psychic awareness constantly floated towards Nie Tian and Dong Li. Apparently, he had harbored ill intentions.

However, he had ignored it.

Convinced that the unusual changes within the volcano had nothing to do with what he was looking for, he turned back and marched on.

By a river of flowing lava, Nie Tian and Dong Li's expressions flickered. They had just risen to their feet and were about to return to the short volcano to finish Lu Shen off.

"What's going on?" Dong Li asked in a soft voice.

Nie Tian closed his eyes.

Relying on the subtle connection between him and the Flame

Dragon Armor, he learned that the Flame Dragon Armor was currently rapidly absorbing flame power from the heart of the volcano, where the lava was fiercest.

He could see that the lava at the heart of the volcano was releasing wisps of fiery light, which were none other than the earthflame essence.

From the look of it, this was what the Flame Dragon Armor truly needed to replenish the tremendous amount of flame power it had consumed.

As the wisps of fiery light converged on the Flame Dragon Armor from every direction, changes suddenly occurred inside the volcano.

Crimson rocks exploded in different locations on the inner wall, which caused the entire volcano to shake violently, therefore giving rise to the loud rumble.

The cave Nie Tian and Dong Li had created halfway up the mountain also began to shake violently.

Fierce lava suddenly came spurting out of the hole at the end of the cave, which Jiang Bo had created with a special awl, leading to the heart of the volcano.

Jiang Bo, who had been forging a spiritual tool wholeheartedly off to the side, screamed upon seeing the unprecedentedly fierce lava rushing madly through the hole in the wall.

At the same time, he messed up the fire incantations he was using to refine the earthflame essence from the lava.

While he was hesitating over whether or not he should leave the cave, rolling lava filled his huge, bronze cauldron. Some even splashed on him.

In a flash, one of his arms and half of his body caught fire.

“Lu Shen!!” Jiang Bo cried out. Abandoning his bronze cauldron

and all of the spiritual materials, he sprinted towards the mouth of the cave.

RUUUUMBLE!

However, the violent shaking caused the rocks on the ceiling to fall.

A giant rock fell on Jiang Bo and pinned him to the floor.

At this moment, Lu Shen was nowhere near the cave. He was on his way down the mountain to make a move on Dong Li.

Upon hearing Jiang Bo's miserable scream, he turned around without the slightest hesitation.

However, by the time he rushed back to the mouth of the cave, he found that Jiang Bo had long since been engulfed by the lava that was now filling the entire cave. Not only that, but some of the burning lava also splashed on him.

The moment lava touched his abdomen and leg, they started burning.

He screamed nonstop, grimacing. No longer caring about his unfinished spiritual tool and Jiang Bo, he tumbled away from the mouth of the cave and rushed down the mountain.

WHOOSH!

Raging lava rushed out of the cave. He constantly switched directions on his way down, and narrowly avoided the pouring lava.

By the time he finally arrived at the foot of the mountain, his abdomen and leg were already badly burned. The agony almost made him cry.

“What a tragedy!”

Dong Li quietly arrived in front of Lu Shen, who was now barely able to stand. Like a cat weeping over a dead mouse (idiom: with pretended sympathy), she said, “One was swallowed by lava; the

other is badly burned. How can you end up being so unfortunate?

She curled her lips. “Is this what people call karma? But I’ve got to thank you. If you didn’t drive us out of that cave, we might have already suffered the same fate as your equipment forger friend and been swallowed by lava.”

Only then did Nie Tian pace over. Seeing Lu Shen in such sore traits, he didn’t seem sympathetic at all.

The badly injured Lu Shen didn’t show the slightest remorse. Instead, strong killing intent burst forth from within his eyes. “Bitch! Even though I’m injured, I can still kill the two of you without breaking a sweat!”

Enraged, Lu Shen swung his arm, and three arrows shot out of his cuff.

The arrows, which were forged out of pure iron, shone with dazzling, golden light, as if they carried fierce metal power, as well as Lu Shen’s psychic awareness.

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

Three of them shot into Dong Li’s bone shield one after another.

Dong Li let out a muffled groan as she experienced incomparable soreness from her shield-holding hand.

Laced with Lu Shen’s psychic awareness, three strands of metal power rushed directly towards Dong Li’s mind.

A screech from the black phoenix rang out in her head. Thanks to its strength, she managed to ward off the psychic attack Lu Shen had hidden within the three arrows.

WHOOSH!

With a swing of her hand, Dong Li shot her cyan awl out of her hand, which flew directly towards Lu Shen’s chest. With an exclamation, Lu Shen hastily tumbled backwards.

Nie Tian let out a cold harrumph as he cast a short-range

Starshift and appeared behind Lu Shen, where he plunged the Flame Star into Lu Shen's back without the slightest hesitation.

CLANK!

As the Flame Star made contact with Lu Shen's back, a metallic, clanking sound rang out.

Lu Shen, who practiced metal power, had summoned all of his metal power and formed a protective shield of golden light over his back.

However, as Nie Tian twisted his wrist, infusing a variety of powers into the Flame Star, the golden shield of light instantly shattered.

As it did, Lu Shen screamed over the life-threatening situation and attempted to escape.

But at this very moment, Dong Li's cyan awl arrived soundlessly and pierced into his neck.

Lu Shen dropped to the ground and died with deep grudges in his eyes.

Without saying a word, Dong Li stepped over, crouched down, and pulled her awl out of Lu Shen's neck. Then, she took his ring of holding and, after examining its contents with her psychic awareness, she said disdainfully, "Can this moron be any poorer?!"

There was nothing valuable within Lu Shen's ring of holding except for several hundred spirit stones.

What she didn't know was that Lu Shen had basically traded in everything he owned in order to get all of the materials he needed to forge that spiritual tool. He had also paid Jiang Bo fifty thousand spirit stones as a service fee. This was why he was so poor.

Deeply disappointed, Dong Li put away Lu Shen's ring of holding and the three metal arrows, not showing the slightest intention to

split them with Nie Tian.

Nie Tian saw it, but didn't think it was a big deal.

"Hmm?" He suddenly felt something. The Spirit Pearl, which had been stored in his bracelet of holding this whole time, seemed to have flashed, but very briefly.

Surprised, he took it out.

The moment he did, he sensed anomalies.

Originally, the souls of Jiang Bo, who had been engulfed by lava, and Lu Shen, who had died just now, were slowly dissipating.

Normally, their discarnate souls would have completely disappeared into heaven and earth within a very short period of time.

However, as the Spirit Pearl appeared, not only did their discarnate souls stop dissipating, but they even morphed into two wisps of faint smoke that were only detectable by the Heaven Eyes, and flew directly into the Spirit Pearl.

Two wisps of invisible souls now hovered within the originally empty Spirit Pearl.

"What's going on?" Dong Li asked, staring at the Spirit Pearl that was flickering with a faint, cyan light.

Nie Tian closed his hand. With an expression that was as calm as ever, he said, "Nothing."

"You're lying!" Dong Li snorted coldly. Recalling the scenes she had witnessed by the lake in the Realm of Dark Underworld, she realized what was happening. "It absorbed those two's discarnate souls, didn't it?"

Seeing that she had figured it out, Nie Tian said, "It appears so."

Dong Li's expression flickered in shock. "T-this thing can actually bend the laws of nature by stopping discarnate souls from disappearing into heaven and earth and absorbing them into

itself?!”

“Yeah, that seems to be the case,” Nie Tian answered.

A shudder ran through Dong Li’s curvaceous body.

She seemed to connect the dots as she asked, “What happened to the countless Specters and discarnate souls that used to be in the Spirit Pearl?”

“Well, I refined them.” Nie Tian answered, looking cornered by Dong Li.

“You were able to refine the Specters and discarnate souls within the Spirit Pearl?!” Dong Li exclaimed.

Immediately afterwards, she looked Nie Tian in the eye and said, beaming, “Nie Tian! No, my brother! Sorry, you are my dear brother! My black phoenix beast spirit can be strengthened when fed with soul power. You have to help me!”

Chapter 441: Earthflame Essence

Dong Li seemed very excited.

The Beast Spirit Incantation the Dong Clan members practiced was a special incantation that allowed people to refine beast spirits into themselves and improve their battle prowess with the beast spirits' strength.

However, the beast spirit would usually lose a large amount of soul power before merging with people. Therefore, the might of the beast spirit could almost never achieve the same level as when they had been alive.

Powerful experts from the Dong Clan would only attempt to strengthen their beast spirit after advancing to the Worldly realm, when they possessed soul power.

Even so, knowing how important and precious their soul power was to them, they usually wouldn't waste it on their beast spirits.

Because of that, it was almost certain that beast spirits wouldn't grow stronger after they were refined and merged with their owners.

That said, it was impossible for Dong Li, who was only at the Greater Heaven stage and didn't possess soul power, to strengthen her black phoenix on her own.

Upon learning that the Spirit Pearl was able to gather and refine Specters and discarnate souls, she was instantly intrigued.

Her overjoyed and warm attitude made Nie Tian slightly uncomfortable.

He reach out his arm and handed the Spirit Pearl to her, saying, "Here. Have a try if you want."

Dong Li seemed confused. "What?"

"See if you can extract soul power from it and use it to strengthen

your black phoenix,” Nie Tian said.

With a quick glance at the Spirit Pearl, Dong Li shook her head repeatedly and said, “I don’t have the ability to refine these discarnate souls yet.”

“Well, it’s not that easy for me to refine discarnate souls either.” Gazing into the Spirit Pearl, Nie Tian discovered that the two wisps of discarnate souls from Jiang Bo and Lu Shen were swimming within it, but they still seemed to contain the negative emotions and broken memories of their past lives. Therefore, they couldn’t be channeled directly into his mind yet.

Furthermore, he had a feeling that there were still things about the Spirit Pearl he didn’t know yet.

Even though he assumed it would be safe to keep it before it gathered too many discarnate souls, he felt that changes would occur when it had gathered enough discarnate souls and Specters.

Therefore, he deemed this mysterious treasure forged by the Phantasms to be a potential problem, which could put him in trouble someday.

“Don’t let people see it. Now put it away!” Dong Li urged.

A mere glance at the Spirit Pearl, which was emanating misty, cyan light, made her uneasy. She couldn’t help but recall the horrifying illusions of mountains of corpses and seas of blood it had put into her mind when she had approached the center of the lake.

If it hadn’t been for Nie Tian, she would have lost her senses and ended up as another discarnate soul in the Spirit Pearl.

“Alright.” Nie Tian put the Spirit Pearl away.

Dong Li let out a sigh of relief and said, “I meant, next time you refine the discarnate souls within it, maybe you can share some with me.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Okay, I’ll try.”

Moments later, the Flame Dragon Armor suddenly shot out of the mouth of the volcano like a streak of flames.

Dragging a tail of flames behind it, it rapidly returned to Nie Tian’s bracelet of holding.

“That’s it?” Dong Li seemed surprised. “That volcano is still spewing lava and flames. Don’t tell me that the Flame Dragon Armor has absorbed enough flame power already.”

Eyes narrowed, Nie Tian examined the Flame Dragon Armor with his mind before saying, “It seems that the Flame Dragon Armor has only absorbed earthflame essence from the heart of this volcano. Earthflame essence was what it truly needed to replenish its flame power.”

“Earthflame essence?!” Dong Li’s expression flickered slightly.

“Why? What’s wrong?” Nie Tian asked.

Dong Li didn’t answer him right away. Instead, she scanned the volcano with her psychic awareness, and then said, “You’re right. It has only absorbed the earthflame essence within this volcano. But I bet you don’t know that once a volcano loses its earthflame essence, it will soon go extinct. Plus, without earthflame essence, a volcano will lose its ability to gather flame power from its surroundings. Therefore, it will never become active again.”

Nie Tian nodded slowly. “I see.”

When the Earth Flame Beast had ravaged the Scarlet Flame Mountain Range in the Realm of Flame Heaven, he had learned something about flame crystals, earthflame essence, and Earthflame Crystal Strings.

Earthflame essence existed only in the absolute centers of volcanoes, and it was capable of attracting and gathering flame power from the vicinity.

The flame power it had gathered would congeal into flame crystals due to the extreme environment. Through tens of thousands of years of change, earthflame essence could become Earthflame Crystal Strings.

Earthflame Crystal Strings were crystallized earthflame essence, inside of which was branded the profound truths of flame power.

Due to the escape of the Earth Flame Beast, the structure of the Scarlet Flame Mountain Range had gone through destructive changes. The Flame Dragon Armor had taken the opportunity to gather large amounts of earthflame essence and a few Earthflame Crystal Strings.

It was at that time that the Flame Dragon Armor had accumulated copious amounts of flame power and gained a strong boost in its strength.

Since both the scale and age of the volcano in front of Nie Tian's eyes were limited, the earthflame essence in it hadn't formed Earthflame Crystal Strings.

Therefore, the Flame Dragon Armor had only absorbed its limited amount of earthflame essence, and flown out looking unsatisfied.

Dong Li smiled bitterly and said, "Without earthflame essence, this short volcano will soon lose its glory and become extinct. The Tool Sect allows foreign Qi warriors to use the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to forge spiritual tools. But they don't allow people to take earthflame essence from the volcanoes, which will ruin them completely.

"The Tool Sect needs the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to cultivate prominent equipment forgers. They need all the volcanoes so that, during the assessment assembly, the participating equipment forgers will be able to use them to forge spiritual tools.

“If anyone dares to takes away the earthflame essence and ruin their volcanoes, the Tool Sect will definitely get to the bottom of it and rain their wrath on those who are responsible!”

Upon hearing Dong Li’s explanation, Nie Tian understood her concerns, and thus said, “Let’s get out of here then!”

The Realm of Unbounded Desolation was filled with volcanoes. As powerful as the Tool Sect was, they couldn’t guard every single one of them.

The Tool Sect had ruled the Realm of Unbounded Desolation for thousands of years now, and would probably continue to do so in the thousands of years to come.

Therefore, in their eyes, the unexplored volcanoes were precious equipment forging resources they had reserved for their future disciples.

Even though they couldn’t use so many volcanoes now, as their sect expanded and the explored volcanoes ran dry, they would eventually need the unexplored ones.

The Flame Dragon Armor had just ruined a volcano for the Tool Sect by absorbing all of its earthflame essence.

Undoubtedly, the Tool Sect wouldn’t let that go.

Dong Li’s expression grew grim as she blurted, “Yeah! Let’s get out of here as quickly as possible! As far as I know, the Tool Sect has marked every single volcano, including the ones that haven’t been explored yet. They allow people to use these volcanoes, but they don’t allow people to take the earthflame essence. I bet the Tool Sect will soon learn about what has happened to this volcano, so we need to leave now.”

Realizing the unfavorable situation, the two of them rapidly marched towards the deepest parts of this desolate land, getting as far away from this volcano as possible.

One day later, they encountered the old man who was nearing

the end of his lifespan again, in a place where the ground was almost filled with rivers of flowing lava.

With a numb expression on his face, the old man marched on at a slow pace. He didn't seem to be in a hurry. He would stop from time to time to examine the auras in his surroundings. Only after discovering nothing noteworthy would he resume his march.

Apparently, every time he stopped, he did so to scan his surroundings for wood power, hoping to discover the legendary place.

The reason why Nie Tian and Dong Li were able to catch up to him within a day was because he didn't focus on marching forward, but rather spent large amounts of time searching the land he had covered.

The old man seemed rather surprised upon seeing them again. "It's you again."

When he had heard the loud rumble from the volcano earlier, he had noticed the tension between them and Lu Shen as well. However, he had been bent on finding that promised land, and thus hadn't wanted to meddle in others' business.

It hadn't mattered to him which of them was killed. Battles like this took place every minute in the Domain of the Falling Stars. Since his priority was his lifespan, he naturally hadn't paid any attention to them.

However, what surprised him was that Nie Tian and Dong Li managed to survive.

He had assumed that Lu Shen and Jiang Bo, who had higher cultivation bases, would have prevailed.

However, upon seeing the old man, Dong Li only nodded briefly at him before marching past him with Nie Tian.

At the same time, Wu Ling descended in the Rainbow Lightning by the mouth of the short volcano.

He tossed a glowing dark-red sphere into the mouth of the volcano. When it reached the heart of the volcano, his face fell as he said to the person beside him, “Someone has indeed taken the earthflame essence!”

“Everyone here knows about our rule. Every equipment forger and fire-wielding Qi warrior that comes to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation knows about our rule! Who would so daringly take the earthflame essence without our authorization!?”

Wu Ling gazed off into the distance, fuming with rage.

Chapter 442: Upheaval

In a remote and desolate area.

The figure of a skinny man suddenly flew out of the wide mouth of an extinct volcano that was about ten thousand meters high.

The man looked like a bag of bones, and his surprisingly handsome face was filled with madness.

He stopped in midair in a location several hundred meters away from the extinct volcano, where he gazed at it silently.

Around that extinct volcano sat a number of active volcanoes, each of which was thousands of meters high. Endless lava was pouring out of the mouths of several of them.

That entire area was covered in rivers of flowing lava, to the point where anyone on the ground would barely find a place to stand.

At that moment, pale-gray smoke floated out of the mouth of the enormous, extinct volcano the skinny man had just come from.

Clusters of pale-gray smoke gathered in midair and started to emit an aura of death that could extinguish all living beings.

Gray and white light could be vaguely seen glowing occasionally in the depths of the smoke.

The skinny man apparently possessed a very high cultivation base. He floated steadily in the air and muttered, "Go! They are holding a decennial assessment assembly. Take this opportunity and surprise them!"

As soon as he uttered those words, the sizable cluster of pale-gray smoke started floating horizontally, carrying an aura of death that could change heaven and earth.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

In the depths of the cluster of smoke, the white and gray light

seemed to be transforming in a certain way, forming a mysterious spherical ward in its surroundings.

A few fire-attributed spirit beasts were absorbing flame power to strengthen their bloodline power in this area, which was covered in lava and flames.

As the huge cluster of pale-gray smoke approached, those spirit beasts seemed to detect danger, and thus fled, howling.

However, the smoke rapidly caught up to them and submerged them.

Engulfed, every spirit beast let out agonized shrieks, but soon became silent.

The speed at which the pale-gray smoke traveled through air was very fast. It wasn't long before it left that area.

On the ground, the few spirit beasts, which were shrieking a moment ago, were nowhere to be seen.

The bizarre pale-gray smoke continued to fly forward. From the look of it, it was flying towards Desolate City and the Tool Sect.

...

In another place...

Nie Tian and Dong Li kept marching forward after passing the old man.

When they were very far ahead of the old man, Dong Li suddenly stopped and said, "I'm afraid we can't let your Flame Dragon Armor absorb earthflame essence here anymore, Nie Tian."

"Yeah?" Nie Tian said.

Dong Li shot him a hard look. "I thought that Flame Dragon Armor of yours only needed flame power from these volcanoes. If I knew the Flame Dragon Armor was actually after the earthflame essence in these volcanoes, I wouldn't have brought you to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in the first place!"

“Truth be told, I didn’t know that either,” Nie Tian said with an embarrassed expression.

Dong Li’s expression grew grim. “This won’t work. If the Flame Dragon Armor absorbs only flame power from these volcanoes, even if the Tool Sect learns about it, they won’t try to stop us.

“However, it’s a whole other story if we’re taking earthflame essence. A volcano’s earthflame essence is its core, the foundation of its existence.

“If we allow your Flame Dragon Armor to absorb earthflame essence from more volcanoes, more volcanoes will go extinct!

“That will definitely catch the Tool Sect’s attention. I bet their people are already looking into this!”

Nie Tian remained silent.

He sent a wisp of psychic awareness into the Flame Dragon Armor. After a brief examination, he learned that the earthflame essence from that short volcano didn’t help the Flame Dragon Armor restore its original state.

It still needed more earthflame essence or large amounts of precious fire-attributed materials in order to replenish the flame power it had consumed to refine the souls and Specters in the Spirit Pearl.

After a moment of hesitation, he said, as if he were reluctant to give up yet, “Is there a way we can secretly take the earthflame essence without attracting the Tool Sect’s attention? The Realm of Unbounded Desolation is such a vast place filled with countless volcanoes. I refuse to believe that there isn’t a corner that the Tool Sect will ignore.”

“I’ve told you, no! You need to drop that idea!” Dong Li sounded exasperated.

She had already sensed the unfavorable situation now that the Flame Dragon Armor had absorbed earthflame essence from that

short volcano. She strongly believed that the Tool Sect had already learned about it.

Under such circumstances, it was actually very dangerous for her to continue to stay here with Nie Tian.

If Nie Tian dared to unleash the Flame Dragon Armor again and let it absorb earthflame essence from other volcanoes, they would definitely be exposed and soon draw retaliation from the Tool Sect.

Even though she was the daughter of the Dong Clan's clanmaster, she wouldn't be able to get out of this easily. After all, it was the Tool Sect's rule they were violating.

After pondering for a while, Nie Tian added, "But you should know that I'm not the key to refine the souls in the Spirit Pearl. The Flame Dragon Armor is. If you want me to help you strengthen your beast spirit with pure soul power from the Spirit Pearl, we'd have to rely on the Flame Dragon Armor. Only when it has absorbed enough flame power will it be able to purge and refine the discarnate souls and Specters within the Spirit Pearl with the fiercest flames."

Deeply shocked, Dong Li said, "So, the Flame Dragon Armor is the key! However, as much as I want to help you and strengthen my black phoenix with soul power from within the Spirit Pearl, that method is not viable in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. If the Flame Dragon Armor still needs more earthflame essence, I can take you to other realms where I'll find you unattended volcanoes.

"But we really can't do that anymore in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Powerful equipment forgers still need the fierce earthflame to forge spiritual tools.

"To the Tool Sect, the volcanoes in this realm are extremely valuable equipment forging resources."

After hearing Dong Li's earnest advice, Nie Tian grew hesitant. Eyebrows furrowed, he weighed his choices.

All of a sudden, a streak of flames appeared on the distant horizon.

Dong Li gazed at it with rapt attention before turn pale with fright and blurting, “It’s the Rainbow Lightning! Damn it! I knew they’d learned about it. That Rainbow Lightning must be here to determine the reason of the disappearance of the earthflame essence!

“I don’t cultivate fire-attributed incantations or have any fire-attributed spiritual tools on me. They probably won’t suspect me, but you...”

The Rainbow Lightning traveled extremely fast and appeared in their sight before Nie Tian’s nine Heaven Eyes could capture them.

Only at that moment did Nie Tian see via his Heaven Eyes that Wu Ling was standing in that Rainbow Lightning, along with a few young male and female disciples of the Tool Sect.

He could also determine those youngsters’ cultivation bases with the help of his Heaven Eyes.

“None of them have entered the Worldly realm.” Nie Tian’s expression flickered as he immediately turned to Dong Li and said, “You’re going to handle them.”

“How?!” Dong Li was somewhat panicked. “You apparently practice fire-attribute incantations!

“They’ll also search your bracelet of holding after they arrive. With a mere glance at the Flame Dragon Armor, they’ll know that it was your doing! Plus, that Spirit Pearl is also in your possession. We’re truly screwed this time!”

“Don’t worry. They won’t know that I’m here.” With these words, Nie Tian summoned the Flame Star and rapidly created a hole next to a river of lava. He jumped in and said, “Cover me up!”

Dong Li was both anxious and angry. “Are you kidding me? You’re a living person with flesh and blood. Do you really expect to

escape their senses by hiding underground?” However, she stopped talking after saying these words.

The reason was that she suddenly discovered that she was no longer able to sense any sign of life from Nie Tian after he had jumped into the hole in the ground.

Even though she could still see Nie Tian, she failed to sense a single shred of life aura as she scanned him with her psychic awareness.

After a brief moment of bewilderment, she snapped back to reality and rapidly covered Nie Tian up with rocks and dirt.

When the hole was fully filled and covered with dark-red rocks, she quietly stepped away from it, and started marching along the river of lava as if nothing had happened.

Moments later, Wu Ling descended in the Rainbow Lightning.

The Rainbow Lightning came to a stop in the air three meters in front of Dong Li. With a grave and stern face, Wu Ling said, “I’m Wu Ling from the Tool Sect. Someone has violated our sect’s rule and taken earthflame essence from one of our volcanoes. Please cooperate so that we can rule you out.”

With a flabbergasted expression on her face, Dong Li said with a terrified tone, “What?! People actually dared to not give face to the Tool Sect and took earthflame essence without authorization?! I don’t practice fire-attribute incantations, and my cultivation base is still rather low. My strength is far from enough for me to channel earthflame essence from any volcano. Here’s my ring of holding. You’re welcome to search it.”

Seeming very cooperative, she took her ring of holding off her jade-like slender finger and held it out.

“Let me!” A male disciple of the Tool Sect beside Wu Ling volunteered, eyes fixed on Dong Li’s curvaceous body.

Wu Ling shot him a hard look before turning to a girl beside him

and saying, “You do it, Little Yuan.”

The man nodded and smiled, looking shamefaced. “You’re the boss.”

A Heaven stage young woman who practiced fire incantations jumped down from the Rainbow Lightning. She quickly approached Dong Li and searched her up and down for storage spiritual tools.

Failing to find any, Huang Yuan said with a smile, “You’re in such a good shape, big sister.”

“You’re a beauty yourself,” Dong Li responded, smiling.

Convinced that Dong Li didn’t have other storage spiritual tools on her, the girl named Huang Yuan grabbed the ring from her hand. After saying “excuse me”, she started examining it with her psychic power.

“She’s not carrying any fire-attributed spiritual tools, Big Brother Ling,” Huang Yuan said with a strange expression on her face.

“Okay, let’s go,” Wu Ling nodded, not sparing Dong Li another glance.

Handing the ring of holding back to Dong Li, Huang Yuan said softly with wide eyes and an envious expression, “You’re wealthy, big sister.”

Dong Li smiled and blinked at her.

Huang Yuan smiled and jumped back into the Rainbow Lightning. Then, she waved at Dong Li and advised kindly, “You’d better not go any further. It’s too dangerous.”

“Thank you. I’ll think about it.” Dong Li replied.

The Rainbow Lightning whooshed away.

Chapter 443: Snatching Prey from A Tiger

In a location several hundred kilometers away from where Nie Tian and Dong Li were, giant rocks split open, creating a deep rift in a grayish-brown extinct volcano.

Intense spatial fluctuations suddenly spread out from the depths of the newly-formed rift.

Moments later, a group of Qi warriors dressed in the Flame God Sect's garments walked out of the rift.

Their leader was a tall, burly, bald man in his prime.

He was none other than "The Flame God", Xia Yi. The entire Domain of the Falling Stars knew this middle Soul realm Qi warrior to be an extremely formidable figure.

Xia Yi rose into midair, overseeing the deadly and silent region. Bulging veins could be seen on his bare arms, as if burning lava was flowing in them instead of blood. "The Tool Sect's assessment assembly will begin soon. Split up and gather earthflame essence from nearby volcanoes with the spiritual tools I've prepared for you.

"I need a copious amount of earthflame essence to break through into the late Soul realm. The result of this operation will determine whether I can make that breakthrough or not."

With a wave of his hand, Xia Yi signaled for the powerful experts from the Flame God Sect to move out.

The powerful experts Xia Yi had brought were mostly at the Worldly and Profound realm, Tang Yang being one of them. Since cultivators with cultivation bases at the Profound realm or higher would be able to travel through the air, the Profound realm experts rose up and flew off in different directions upon hearing Xia Yi's order. "We won't disappoint you, sectmaster!"

Tang Yang and the other Worldly realm experts had to fly

towards nearby volcanoes that had smoke and flames rising from them in air-transportation spiritual tools.

They were all well-aware that their sectmaster had come to a critical point in his cultivation.

In order for Xia Yi, who had mastered all kinds of fire incantations, to advance to the late Soul realm, a substantial amount of earthflame essence would be needed.

However, earthflame essence only existed in the hearts of active volcanoes.

The incomparably large volcano that stood beside the Flame God Sect was the foundation of their sect. Bearing the future of their sect in mind, Xia Yi couldn't take earthflame essence from that volcano.

Furthermore, as large as it was, it was only one volcano.

It would be almost impossible for him to break through into the late Soul realm with the earthflame essence within it alone.

Throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars, the Realm of Unbounded Desolation had the most volcanoes.

Even though he knew perfectly well about the rule established by the Tool Sect, he had decided to snatch this prey from the tiger so that he could advance to the late Soul realm.

The fact that he had brought so many powerful experts from the Flame God Sect made it clear that he expected war.

Xia Yi let out a cold harrumph, looking off into the direction of Desolate City and the Tool Sect. "The Tool Sect... After I enter the late Soul realm with the earthflame essence I gather from here, all of the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will belong to the Flame God Sect!"

Seeing that all of the Flame God Sect experts were off to their tasks, he took out a Sound Stone and spoke into it with a frown,

“How is it going over there, Zhao Shanling?”

Floating above numerous erupting volcanoes, the skinny man replied with a sinister and sickly smile, “Don’t worry, Flame God. Everything is going according to plan. The Death Reign is moving quickly towards the Tool Sect. Wherever it passes, no lives will survive!”

The Flame God nodded slowly from hundreds of kilometers away. “Good. Once I enter the late Soul realm, I’ll help you take back what belongs to you! You’ll have the Tool Sect, and we will rule the Realm of Unbounded Desolation together!”

“That’s right! The sectmaster of the Tool Sect should have been me!” Zhao Shanling laughed wildly.

...

On a volcano that was thousands of meters high.

Halfway up the crimson, stony volcano, a cave led directly towards the lava inside of it. Facing the pool of lava, a middle-aged, yet still attractive, woman was switching between hand seals, channeling fiercest flame power up from the heart of the volcano into a huge axe that was floating above the pool of lava and shining with dazzlingly golden light.

From time to time, the huge axe would dip into the pool of lava.

As the elegant and beautiful woman practiced her secret incantations devotedly, the originally faint inscriptions on the surface of the huge axe gradually grew clearer.

Standing behind the woman, an old man with a bushy beard stared hard at the large axe without blinking. Even his breaths were slightly rapid.

The old man’s name was Qin Yi. He was a member of the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, currently at the late Profound realm, only one step away from entering the Soul realm. Regarding seniority, he should be considered Qin Yan’s great-grandfather.

That large axe was being custom-made for him. If things went smoothly, it would come out as a Spirit Channeling grade treasure.

The charming, middle-aged woman was Pei Qiqi and Li Ye's master, Zhen Huilan.

The forging process had already lasted several months. Now, it had come to a critical moment.

SHEW!

The figure of a man suddenly descended to the mouth of that volcano. It turned out to be Hua Mu.

Standing by the mouth of the volcano, Hua Mu gazed down and could vaguely see the large axe floating over the pool of lava.

Qin Yin sensed his arrival, and thus flew out of the cave to the mouth of the volcano. Upon seeing that it was Hua Mu, Qin Yi let out a sigh of relief and said with a smile, "You scared me... Why are you here?"

Before Hua Mu had a chance to talk, his eyebrows rose as he added, "What? After avoiding her for so long, you finally failed to fight the desire to meet her, didn't you? But she's forging a spiritual tool for me now. You've caught her at a bad time."

Hua Mu smiled bitterly. "I only decided to come because I know she's forging a spiritual tool for you, and she would too busy to see me."

Qin Yin let out a sigh. "Why are you hiding from her?"

Hua Mu's expression grew grim. "My clock is ticking. It won't be very long before my lifespan runs out. As a dying man, I can only sneak a glance at her. What else can I do?"

"Are you sure there's no way to extend your lifespan?" Qin Yi asked with furrowed eyebrows.

"What can I do? Unless I can find the Fruits of Life, or..." Hua Mu shook his head and decided not to mention Nie Tian. "Forget it. If I

can somehow live through this tribulation and gain more years, I won't hide from her anymore. But if I can't, then everything will be over soon. It's better that we don't meet again."

"If you don't want to meet her, then why did you come?" Qin Yi asked.

Hua Mu smiled bitterly. "I don't know. Stupidity, huh?"

Qin Yi didn't try to persuade him. "I can't understand you... You haven't started a family your entire life. Now that your time is coming, why don't you find yourself a disciple? Look at Huilan. At least she has Li Ye and Qiqi to carry on her legacies. What do you have?"

Hua Mu shook his head. "It's not that easy to find a disciple. I set my mind on one, but someone beat me to it and took him in already."

The two of them chatted and caught up on various other matters.

All of a sudden, Hua Mu's expression flickered drastically as he jerked his head to gaze off into the distance.

He vaguely saw a cluster of pale-gray smoke rapidly moving in the Tool Sect's direction.

Hua Mu gasped with astonishment. "The Death Reign! Zhao Shanling is back!"

A shudder ran through Qin Yi. "Zhao Shanling!? How does he dare return to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?"

"The appearance of the Death Reign and return of Zhao Shanling... I'm afraid an upheaval will soon take place in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation!" Hua Mu took a deep breath. "You stay here and protect Huilan. I'll go inform the Tool Sect!"

"Sure!" Qin Yi nodded vigorously.

Hua Mu vanished in the next moment.

...

In the Tool Sect.

As the sectmaster of the Tool Sect, Qi Bailu was sitting at the end of a great hall filled with large equipment forging cauldrons. Eyes narrowed, he nodded repeatedly as he listened to the elders report the arrangements regarding the assessment assembly.

Solemn and dressed in frosty white garments, Qi Bailu seemed like a man of few words.

On the enormous stone wall behind him was engraved a map of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, where each and every volcano was marked out.

At this moment, of all the spots on the map, three were flickering, as if they were on the verge of going out.

Qi Bailu jerked around to look at the three flickering spots. A hint of rage appeared in his eyes as he said, "People are gathering earthflame essence regardless of our rule, and they are doing it simultaneously in different locations!"

The elders of the Tool Sect also grew angry looking at the changes on the map. Some of them started venting their anger.

"They must have death wishes!"

"These newcomers seem to have forgotten about our rule. I can't believe they would actually dare to gather earthflame essence during the assessment assembly!"

"Do they assume that we can't spare our hands to deal with them?"

As they spoke, a few other spots started to flicker on the map, as if they were also losing earthflame essence.

"Something is wrong!" Qi Bailu said with a frown. "Send Worldly realm and Profound realm disciples to those locations, and find out what's going on with those volcanoes! Report any findings to me immediately!"

“Yes, sectmaster!”

The elders rapidly walked out of the great hall to obey their sectmaster’s commands.

Chapter 444: The Death Reign

In the barren land filled with erupting volcanoes.

After hiding from Wu Ling's search, Nie Tian and Dong Li didn't choose to return to Desolate City, but rather went deeper into the wilderness.

They came across two volcanoes on their way, but Nie Tian didn't unleash the Flame Dragon Armor to absorb earthflame essence from them.

Whenever the Flame Dragon Armor expressed its yearning for earthflame essence, Nie Tian would suppress it with his thoughts and restrain it from acting recklessly.

He knew it wasn't safe to do that yet.

However, that didn't mean that he had given up on that idea. He just wanted to find a place very far from the Tool Sect, where he would seek an opportunity to restore flame power for the Flame Dragon Armor.

During the past two days, Dong Li had repeatedly asked him how had he managed to escape Wu Ling's psychic scan.

Every time, Nie Tian had muddled through his answer.

During this period of time, Nie Tian had also noticed via his nine Heaven Eyes that a few Rainbow Lightnings had whizzed past with Profound realm experts from the Tool Sect in them.

Every time, he had grown very nervous, suspecting that those powerful experts from the Tool Sect had come for him, just like Wu Ling and his people.

Qi warriors with cultivation bases at the Worldly realm or higher would have transformed their psychic power into soul power, therefore enabling them to sense the subtle fluctuations of souls.

His bloodline talent, Life Stealth, only allowed him to hide the

signs of his life, but not his soul fluctuations.

If those experts' target had been him, he wouldn't have possibly been able to hide from them.

The strange thing was that those experts seemed to have preset targets. Even though they had clearly sensed their existence from the air, they didn't even spare them a single glance as they flashed past them.

Watching another Rainbow Lightning flash past in the distant sky, Dong Li came to a stop and said with furrowed eyebrows, "Something is wrong...

"Judging by the date, the Tool Sect's assessment assembly should have opened already. Those powerful experts from the Tool Sect should be guarding the volcanoes close to Desolate City and supervising the equipment forgers who have attended the assessment assembly.

"Instead, they are now flying back and forth. It doesn't seem right."

Nie Tian also noticed the anomaly.

It was indeed strange considering they had seen Profound realm experts riding Rainbow Lightnings towards the deepest parts of the barren land during the past two days.

SHEW!

Wu Ling's Rainbow Lightning returned.

Upon noticing it, Nie Tian immediately hid himself with the same method he had used days ago.

Moments later, the Rainbow Lightning stopped in the air right before Dong Li. The girl named Huang Yuan looked down at her and said, "Big sister, great changes have occurred in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Many people are gathering earthflame essence. All of our disciples have been summoned back to our sect.

You'd better head back to Desolate City as well!"

As soon as she uttered these words, the Rainbow Lightning shot off into the distance.

After the Rainbow Lightning disappeared into the distant sky, Nie Tian climbed out of the hole he hid in and said with a shocked expression on his face, "Many people are gathering earthflame essence? What's happening?"

Looking worried, Dong Li said, "Wu Ling and those with him are at the Greater Heaven and Heaven stage, but the Tool Sect is ordering them to return as quickly as possible. This means that the Tool Sect is afraid that, considering their cultivation bases and strength, not only will they not be able to help with the situation, but they may easily get killed."

Gazing at a distant volcano that had smoke rising from it, Nie Tian said, "Something big must have happened in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. I don't think it's wise for us to continue marching forward, considering our current strength."

Nie Tian had also sensed danger.

While he was hesitant over whether he should give up the idea of letting the Flame Dragon Armor gather more earthflame essence, one of his Heaven Eyes discovered an anomaly.

He saw that the old man that they had passed twice recently was running at full speed, his face filled with fear.

Chasing after him was a huge cluster of pale-gray smoke.

The late Greater Heaven stage old man ran madly on the ground covered in rivers of flowing lava, before he was eventually engulfed by the huge cluster of pale-gray smoke.

He let out blood-curdling screams.

Via that Heaven Eye, Nie Tian could see with great clarity that the old man had lost all signs of life seconds after he was devoured

by the smoke, which carried an aura of death that could wither all plants and extinguish all lives.

A Profound realm expert from the Tool Sect arrived from another direction. Looking at the pale-gray smoke, his face turned ghastly with fright. “The Death Reign! That’s Zhao Shanling’s Death Reign!”

The cluster of pale-gray smoke continued to move in a preset track at a very high speed. The Profound realm expert from the Tool Sect could only follow it from a safe distance as he took out a Sound Stone and whispered warnings into it.

Since this was happening in a location far from Nie Tian and Dong Li, Dong Li had absolutely no idea what was happening. However, she noticed the strange look on Nie Tian’s face, and thus hastily asked him what was going on.

Considering that the current location of the smoke was quite far from them, and that it was moving directly towards Desolate City and the Tool Sect, Nie Tian deemed that he and Dong Li would be safe from it.

Even so, he was deeply shocked and terrified after witnessing the late Greater Heaven stage old man being extinguished within seconds.

“I saw the old man, who was at the end of his life... H-he was engulfed by a cluster of pale-gray smoke, and died almost instantly.” With a deep breath, Nie Tian forced himself to calm down, and then he added, “A Profound realm expert from the Tool Sect is following the smoke from a great distance, and reporting to their sect via his Sound Stone.

“As he did, he repeatedly mentioned the names ‘Death Reign’ and ‘Zhao Shanling’.”

Dong Li’s face turned pale with fright. “The Death Reign?! And Zhao Shanling!?”

Even her body stiffened somewhat. “Are you sure that expert from the Tool Sect said ‘Death Reign’ and ‘Zhao Shanling’?”

Nie Tian was surprised by her reaction. “I’m sure! Why? Do you know something?”

“Where is that pale-gray smoke going? It’s not coming towards us, is it?” Dong Li was freaking out. “If it is coming towards us, I need to summon my black phoenix and get us out of here immediately!”

“No,” Nie Tian said. “it seems to be moving towards the Tool Sect.”

After learning that horrible thing was not coming towards them, Dong Li felt greatly relieved. She sank down to the ground without the slightest regard for proper manners. “Oh boy... I thought the Death Reign was coming for us. If it does come our way, considering our puny strength, we won’t have the slightest chance of surviving it!”

“What’s going on?!” Nie Tian asked with a grim expression.

Dong Li still seemed rather shaken as she explained, “The Tool Sect’s previous sectmaster had three disciples: the eldest disciple, Qi Bailu, who’s currently the sectmaster of the Tool Sect, the second disciple, Zhao Shanling, and the youngest disciple, Zhen Huilan, who’s Li Ye and Pei Qiqi’s master. During the time when the three of them competed for the position of sectmaster, each of them was required to forge a spiritual tool, which would be subject to the assessment of all the sect elders. The disciple whose spiritual tool got the most votes would become the new sectmaster of the Tool Sect.

“The spiritual tool forged by Zhao Shanling turned out to be the most formidable, far more powerful than the spiritual tools forged by Qi Bailu and Zhen Huilan.

“However, not only was he not appointed as the new sectmaster

of the Tool Sect, but he even received the disapproval of all of the elders, and was evicted from the Tool Sect.

“The spiritual tool he forged was the Death Reign!”

Dong Li paused to gather her thoughts before continuing, “I heard this from seniors in my clan. No one knew how Zhao Shanling forged that Death Reign and made it so formidable. Back then, even though the Tool Sect was the most powerful Qi warrior sect in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, it wasn’t the only one.

“However, after Zhao Shanling created the Death Reign, even he seemed to be unable to gain control of it right away. As a result, it got away from him and wiped out all of the other Qi warrior sects in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

“Wherever the Death Reign passed, Qi warriors were sucked into it and turned into dried corpses.

“Even powerful experts at the late Profound realm couldn’t survive after being sucked into it. They just lasted a bit longer, but that was all.

“All of the Tool Sect elders were terrified by its formidable might. Even the sectmaster of the Tool Sect, Zhao Shanling’s master, wasn’t able to subdue the Death Reign. Eventually, he managed to send it into a spatial rift that led to an unknown dimension along with Zhao Shanling, but it cost him his life.

“Zhao Shanling has disappeared since then.

“Everyone assumed he was withering away in a remote and chaotic dimension. Who would have thought he has actually found his way back!”

Nie Tian was shocked. “Are you saying that the Death Reign is a spiritual tool?!”

Dong Li smiled bitterly. “That’s what I’ve heard, but I’m not sure if it is. Thousands died because Zhao Shanling brought the Death Reign to this world. It was because of this monstrous calamity he

inflicted upon the people of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, which even killed the sectmaster of the Tool Sect, that he was eventually evicted from the Tool Sect.”

“Are you saying that this man managed to survive a chaotic dimension and return?!”

“Nie Tian! We can’t stay in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation any longer. We’ve got to get out of here as quickly as possible if we don’t want to die!”

“You’re not suggesting we should return to Desolate City now, are you?” Nie Tian asked with a grim expression on his face. “Desolate City and the Tool Sect are right next to each other. We’d be seeking death if we went back to Desolate City now.

Chapter 445: A Star of Calamity

Deep in the night.

Atop a barren mountain peak that didn't grow a blade of grass, Nie Tian and Dong Li stuck out their heads from behind a huge rock and gazed off into the distance.

There were a few caves halfway up this mountain peak, which they had already examined on their way up to the mountaintop.

Some of the caves stretched deep into the belly of the mountain. Apparently, powerful equipment forgers had once used them to forge spiritual tools.

This was an extinct volcano that had long since been drained of flame power and earthflame essence.

Bathed in chilly moonlight, Nie Tian scanned the vicinity with the help of his nine Heaven Eyes.

He spread them as far as he could in every direction. Floating high in the sky, the Heaven Eyes covered an extremely large area around him.

Through them, he noticed that people seemed to be moving about on a remote volcano, which had smoke and blazing flames rising from it.

Under the night sky, streams of lava poured down the volcano with twists and turns, making them look like dragons of flame twisting their gigantic bodies.

Dong Li was also glancing around, though she was limited by her cultivation base, and couldn't see very far.

Nie Tian pointed off into the distance and explained to her in a low voice, "There's nothing but a cluster of volcanoes over in that direction. No normal people would linger in such a place. However, many powerful Qi warriors are now bustling in that

area. Since it's very far away, I can see their shapes, but not their faces. So I don't know who they are or where they are from.

“However, a few Profound realm experts and Rainbow Lightnings from the Tool Sect are heading over there.

“According to Huang Yuan, people are gathering earthflame essence in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Those powerful experts from the Tool Sect must have been sent there to learn what the situation is.

“If my speculations are correct, those bustling Qi warriors in that remote area are gathering earthflame essence.”

After gazing a while into the direction pointed out by Nie Tian, and failing to see anything, Dong Li gave up.

She withdrew her gaze and turned around to sit behind a huge rock, with her back against it. With a bitter smile, she said, “Nie Tian, you're such a star of calamity.”

“What do you mean?!” Nie Tian seemed disgruntled.

Dong Li's bright eyes glittered with a strange light. “Have you noticed that, wherever you go, calamities follow? Back when you were still in the Realm of Flame Heaven, Heaven Gates appeared out of nowhere, through which Demon outsiders returned. Later, when you went to the Realm of Split Void, Phantasms descended from the sky.

“Afterwards, when we went to the Realm of Dark Underworld, the ‘Phantasm relic’ turned out to be one of the Phantasms’ ancient starships.

“Now that you've come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, not only has Zhao Shanling returned with his Death Reign, but foreign Qi warriors are also gathering earthflame essence during the Tool Sect's assessment assembly.

“Wherever you go, upheavals occur, and people are plunged into misery and suffering. You tell me if you're a star of calamity.”

Nie Tian mulled over her words, and discovered that she actually wasn't wrong, and that he couldn't refute her statement.

Snorting out a laugh, Dong Li said, "You were right earlier. If we don't return to Desolate City, at least we can avoid the Death Reign and stay out of Zhao Shanling's grudge against the Tool Sect. At this moment, we're in the middle between the Tool Sect and the foreign Qi warriors who are gathering earthflame essence. We can't go further, since if we do, we may run into those who are gathering earthflame essence.

"Considering that they dare to break the rule established by the Tool Sect and gather earthflame essence in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, and that the Tool Sect have sent out Profound realm experts to deal with them, they're not the kind of people we can mess with.

"We can't go back, since if we do, we may come across the Death Reign.

"It's such a sad situation we're in. Neither going forward nor back is an option. I really don't know what we should do now."

Upon hearing her words, Nie Tian smiled bitterly and inwardly sighed over his bad luck.

After a moment of awkward silence he said, "Well, I'm hungry. Let's eat something first."

With these words, he took out some of the spirit beast meat he had purchased in the Dong Clan, cooked it with fire-attributed spiritual materials, and shared it with Dong Li.

After consuming a significant amount of spirit beast meat, he sat silently and started practicing cultivation with Star Stones.

It wasn't long before wisps of rich flesh power rose from his stomach.

Some of them were secretly absorbed by the Flame Dragon Armor in his bracelet of holding, though the majority of them were

attracted and devoured by the green aura coiled up in his heart.

Moments later, all of the newly-generated flesh power was gone.

That was when Nie Tian noticed the anomaly with the green aura again.

The green spots in some of the crystal-like chains within the green aura once again started to flicker, looking quite active.

The same thing had happened a few times recently, and finally caught Nie Tian's attention.

He formed a strand of awareness and soul power and sent it into his heart, where it observed in silence.

He had a feeling that the green spots in those crystal-like chains must have sensed something or been set off by something. Otherwise, they wouldn't have behaved so strangely.

"This is odd..." He thought to himself as he attempted to let that strand of thought approach the flickering spots in those crystal-like chains.

BANG!

The moment his thought made contact with the bright spots in those crystal-like chains, a mysterious feeling struck him.

He felt as if something somewhere was attracting that green aura, which contained the profound truths of life.

Immediately afterwards, with bated breath and rapt attention, he formed more strands of thought and soul power, with which he repeatedly touched the flickering spots within the few crystal-like chains.

As he did, the originally vague feeling gradually grew clear.

All of a sudden, his eyes snapped open.

The direction he was looking was neither towards Desolate City nor towards the cluster of active volcanoes where the foreign Qi

warriors were.

Rather, he was looking to his left, at a cluster of extinct volcanoes that were just like the one he was sitting on.

He withdrew his thought and pondered with a frown, “What can it be that’s causing my bloodline to grow restless?”

“The Realm of Unbounded Desolation is such a miraculous place,” Dong Li muttered. “On the one hand, Zhao Shanling forged the Death Reign in this realm, which can wither all lives and reduce living beings to dried corpses. On the other hand, people say there’s a magical place in this realm where wood power is as thick as water, and can even produce Fruits of Life.

“The Death Reign and that magical place are none other than two extremes, yet they both seem to exist in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

Nie Tian listened to Dong Li’s muttering as he wracked his mind for an answer. Suddenly, his eyes suddenly lit up.

A shudder ran through him as he thought to himself, “A magical place where wood power is as thick as water, and can even produce the Fruits of Life! My bloodline is called ‘Life Bloodline’. Those fruits are called Fruits of Life. Can it be that they’re somehow related? If the rumor is real and that place does exist, can the Fruits of Life be what have been stirring my bloodline?!”

Another shudder ran through him as soon as he came to that realization, believing that was most likely the truth.

With a deep breath, he once again gazed off in the direction from which his bloodline had received a mysterious stir, and discovered that there was nothing but extinct volcanoes in that direction. Not a single person could be seen.

Both the experts from the Tool Sect and the foreign earthflame essence gatherers were very unlikely to go to that area.

If it weren’t for the abnormal changes that had repeatedly

occurred to his bloodline, he would never have considered probing into that area either.

With these thoughts in mind, he finally knew where to go. Pointing in that direction, he said determinedly, "Let's go there."

Dong Li followed his hand and looked in the direction he was pointing out. After a brief glance, she nodded with a smile, saying, "That's a wise choice."

"It is?"

"The area you're pointing at used to be where the Bonebrutes' headquarters was. All of the volcanoes in that area have remained silent for thousands of years.

"Furthermore, as the Bonebrute's former headquarters, that area has long since been searched by countless Qi warriors from everywhere in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

"All of the secrets buried there have been unearthed. Anything that seemed related to the Bonebrutes, no matter how remotely, has been dug out and taken away for research.

"No one has discovered anything noteworthy in that area in centuries.

"That's why almost no one ever goes there to try their luck.

"Plus, since there are nothing but extinct volcanoes in that area, those foreign Qi warriors who are here to gather earthflame essence won't go there. It's also far from the Tool Sect, so Zhao Shanling's Death Reign won't float there either.

"Considering everything that's going on, that's probably the safest place in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation now."

Dong Li assumed Nie Tian had only chosen to go to that area to avoid trouble and stay safe.

Instead of explaining, Nie Tian grinned and said, "That's exactly what I thought."

“...Alright, let’s go. I hope the turbulent situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will end soon. It’s probably the safest choice to stay there before it does.” Dong Li supported his decision.

Therefore, the two of them moved out according to Nie Tian’s directions, hiding their tracks as they did.

Several days later, Dong Li and Nie Tian arrived at the area that used to be the Bonebrutes’ headquarters.

Nie Tian scanned the vicinity with his Heaven Eyes. All he could see was desolation and silence, and not the slightest sign of life.

However, since the moment he had arrived, his bloodline had grown more and more restless.

Chapter 446: The Roving Target

At the heart of an enormous volcano.

Li Ye and Pei Qiqi's master, Zhen Huilan, was switching between exquisite incantations to refine the flame power she had summoned from the earth's core, and using it to refine the huge axe repeatedly.

Qin Yi stood in a corner and looked closely at the golden axe without blinking.

WHOOSH!

A slender wisp of golden aura flew out of Zhen Huilan's cuff and slowly approached the huge axe.

Like a slithering snake, the wisp of aura was the soul she was going to vest the golden axe with.

Once it successfully merged with the axe, the axe would possess its own spirit and awareness, and thus enter the ranks of Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tools.

However, just as the wisp of golden aura was about to make contact with the golden axe, Zhen Huilan made a slight mistake with her hand seals.

PHOOH! PHOOH!

The wisp of golden aura was burned away by fierce flames due to the incompleteness of one of the spell formations within the golden axe.

The detailed and beautiful patterns on the surface of the golden axe instantly went from bright and clear to blurry and dim.

"I failed," Zhen Huilan said with a bitter expression. As she reached out her hand and grabbed in the air, the large golden axe flew into her hand.

She stepped back into the cave holding it, shook her head, and

said to Qin Yi with an apologetic tone, “I can’t believe I would make a mistake after months of effort, and ruin everything. Sorry for wasting so many of your precious spiritual materials.”

Qin Yi grabbed the golden axe that Zhen Huilan was handing to him, and said with a frustrated expression, “It’s not your fault. I’m out of luck.”

With a frown, Zhen Huilan said, “I don’t know why, but I constantly felt ill-at-ease during the past few days, which distracted me a lot when I was casting fire incantations. I’ve been forging spiritual tools for so many years, and my cultivation base is by no means inadequate. It shouldn’t have been like this. I wonder what happened that made me so uneasy.”

After a moment of silence, Qin Yi said, “Actually, your feelings are well-founded... Something big has indeed happened in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

Days ago, when Hua Mu had come over, he had intentionally concealed his aura. Adding in that she had been devoted to the equipment forging process, she hadn’t noticed a thing about his arrival.

Later, in order for her to focus on forging that spiritual tool, Qin Yi hadn’t told her about the reappearance of Zhao Shanling and the Death Reign.

He had assumed that she would have been able to forge that huge golden axe successfully, since she hadn’t known about any of the things going on in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Who would have thought she would fail anyway?

“What happened?!” Zhen Huilan exclaimed.

She was very confident about her equipment forging attainments. Her instincts told her that something had been causing her uneasiness and difficulty in concentrating.

“Your second senior martial brother is back... with his Death

Reign,” Qin Yi explained.

“The Death Reign is back in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?!” Zhen Huilan gasped with astonishment.

She finally found the reason why she had been feeling uneasy lately. “And Zhao Shanling is back too?! It was because that damn Death Reign of his that master died. I can’t believe he’s still alive!”

“The Death Reign is moving towards the Tool Sect,” Qin Yi added.

“Oh, no!” Without saying another word, Zhen Huilan flew out of the cave and shot towards the Tool Sect.

Qin Yi sped off after her.

The pale-gray smoke continued to float towards the Tool Sect at a fast speed.

Wherever it passed, no life was spared. Every Qi warrior who was engulfed by it died within a very short time. Not a single one survived.

At this moment, three Profound realm experts from the Tool Sect were following it from a safe distance.

They had long since informed their sectmaster, Qi Bailu, about the Death Reign.

However, many foreign equipment forgers were still forging spiritual tools in the cluster of volcanoes not far ahead on the Death Reign’s path, hoping to achieve good results at the assessment assembly.

At the mouth of a mountain valley on the Death Reign’s path.

The sectmaster of the Tool Sect, Qi Bailu and a few powerful experts were waiting with grave expressions.

“The Death Reign, Zhao Shanling, and Xia Yi from the Flame God Sect...” Qi Bailu thought to himself as he gazed off into the distance. Upon seeing the gradually approaching Death Reign, his

expression grew especially grim.

He had learned that it was Xia Yi and his men from the Flame God Sect that had been gathering earthflame essence in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Zhao Shanling and his Death Reign had showed up at the exact same time when Xia Yi had led his men to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to gather earthflame essence.

Qi Bailu was convinced that Zhao Shanling had reached some kind of agreement with Xia Yi.

“Establish wards!” Qi Bailu called out. “We’ve got to stop the Death Reign from going through this mountain valley! Behind this very valley are equipment forgers who have come from other realms to attend our assessment assembly. If we fail to stop the Death Reign, inform the supervising disciples to stop them immediately and evacuate them to Desolate City as quickly as possible!”

Each and every powerful Tool Sect expert beside him looked as if they were facing formidable foes.

“I can’t believe this traitor has actually come back alive!”

“Now that he dares to return to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, we’ll make sure this is a one-way trip for him. Kill him to avenge our former sectmaster!”

“Zhao Shanling plunged the people in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation into an abyss of misery. It’s hard to believe he would come back again.”

Many powerful experts from the Tool Sect vented their indignation as one spiritual tool after another rose into the air, forming light screens of various colors at the mouth of the mountain valley in an attempt to stop the Death Reign from going any further.

However, they all cowered behind the wards they formed, clearly

scared of the Death Reign.

...

In the area filled with extinct volcanoes.

Nie Tian glanced around at a large number of huge craters and asked, "What's up with these craters?"

Dong Li glanced around and said, "The Bonebrutes' bone palaces used to sit in these craters. The Bonebrutes built their bone palaces with the bones of spirit beasts and other creatures. Since the bones they used to build those bone palaces still contained power when they were discovered, people tore them down and took the bones away for equipment forging.

"I told you before we came that this whole area has been repeatedly explored and searched by Qi warriors from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars. They didn't even leave a single bone behind.

"You can drop your fantasy of finding anything here. We might as well find a place and sit out this turbulent period in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation."

With these words, she went straight forward to find a comfortable place to practice cultivation.

Nie Tian, however, stood in place, his eyes narrowed.

As soon as he had arrived in this area, the green aura in his heart had started to grow increasingly restless. The bright green spots in some of the crystal-like chains started to flicker increasingly frequently.

Before, the green spots would only flicker after the green aura had absorbed flesh power from spirit beast meat, and quiet down soon afterwards.

However, since he had come to this place, the green spots in those few crystal-like chains hadn't stopped flickering.

Therefore, he was convinced that the thing causing the abnormal changes to those green spots must exist somewhere in this area.

With this thought in mind, he walked around while sensing the green flickering spots in those crystal-like chains, hoping to find what was interacting with his bloodline.

Other than the numerous extinct volcanoes in this area, enormous craters were the only things people could see.

Each of them had been used to support a magnificent bone palace, but now everything had been torn down and taken away, and not a single piece of bone was left.

Nie Tian roamed about without a destination as he repeatedly sensed with his bloodline, yet found nothing.

At first, Dong Li assumed that he was only looking around because he was curious about these Bonebrute relics, and thus ignored him.

However, after noticing that he had been wandering around for a long time, Dong Li realized that he must be trying to find something.

Then, she came up to him and said with a discouraging tone, "Don't tell me that you're trying to find something valuable left by the Bonebrutes. Don't you think people would have already discovered them and taken them away after thousands of years of exploration? I suggest you stop wasting your time, Nie Tian. You'll never find anything."

Nie Tian ignored her as he continued to probe around with the green spots within those few crystal-like chains, with his eyes narrowed.

His nine Heaven Eyes were also spread out and scanning the vicinity for any anomalies.

However, to his surprise, the green spot gradually stopped flickering as he did.

Deeply puzzled, he took out and consumed some more spirit beast meat. As the meat was converted into pure flesh power and absorbed by the green aura in his heart, he started his search again.

After his previous attempts, he had already discovered that, every time the green aura consumed copious flesh power, the green spots within it would grow very active.

It was no exception this time.

After absorbing every last wisp of flesh power from the spirit beast meat, the green aura still seemed unsatisfied and full of desire.

At that moment, the green spots started flickering again, as if they had a direction again.

He immediately sent a wisp of thought into those green spots, and started sensing wholeheartedly.

A while later, his eyes snapped open, and he found himself facing another remote area.

For the second time, the green spots had led him to a location, but it was clearly not the same as the first time.

This meant that whatever was causing his bloodline to stir was not stationary, but rather constantly on the move!

Nie Tian was shocked by his new finding.

Chapter 447: A Pattern Emerges

That was when Nie Tian thought of that legend again.

According to Dong Li, for thousands of years, people with limited lifespans would come roam the barren land in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, placing their last shred of hope in finding that miraculous place where wood power was as thick as water.

There had been quite a few Qi warriors who were experts at using wood power among them. Some of them had managed to detect rich wood power in different locations in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation at different times.

However, none of them had actually managed to enter that miraculous place.

A major reason why many people doubted the authenticity of the legend was that people had claimed to discover that miraculous place in different locations.

But at this moment, Nie Tian was deeply convinced that whatever was stirring his bloodline was not stationary, but rather constantly on the move.

All of a sudden, he started to think that the legend might be true.

Ignoring Dong Li's persuasion, he determined a new direction according to the level of activity of the green spots within the crystal-like chains in his bloodline.

He pointed in a direction and said, "Let's go there."

Dong Li turned to look, and discovered that he was pointing at another area filled with extinct volcanoes. Thus, she asked, looking rather confused, "The 50-kilometer-radius region around us used to be the Bonebrutes' headquarters. Extinct volcanoes are the only things we can find in this whole region. Does it really matter if we go there or stay here?"

“Don’t tell me that you’re still hung on the idea of finding valuable things left by the Bonebrutes...”

Nie Tian nodded. “I believe I will find something.”

“Stop dreaming, will you?!” Dong Li curled her lips. “Over the past thousands of years, tens of thousands of Qi warriors from every corner of the Domain of the Falling Stars have come and searched this region. Not a single bone is left of those bone palaces. What in the world are you expecting to find?”

“You can either come with me or stay here. Either way, I’m not going to give up. I’ll go search over there.” With a hearty smile, Nie Tian sped off into the distance.

He wasn’t sure that he would be able to find what had been attracting his bloodline by relying on the subtle interactions between it and his bloodline, just as he was uncertain that the legendary place was what had been attracting his bloodline in the first place.

Furthermore, he didn’t want to explain his bloodline and the fact that he was able to detect something with it to Dong Li.

“Damn fool!” Dong Li cursed, seeing that Nie Tian had moved out, completely ignoring her persuasion.

Even so, she decided to follow along.

Afterwards, Nie Tian constantly changed directions according to the profound sensations he received from his bloodline, as he kept searching for that magical land.

However, its constant change of location made it very hard for Nie Tian to find it.

Gradually, he followed the indications away from the Bonebrutes’ former headquarters, and traveled among numerous extinct volcanoes.

Half a day passed.

A skinny man that looked like a bag of bones suddenly descended in the Bonebrutes' former headquarters, and sat down at the bottom of one of the enormous craters.

It was Zhao Shanling.

Soon, profound spatial energy fluctuations exploded from within him.

Like water ripples, they rapidly spread out, forming layers of spatial energy wards over the enormous crater he was sitting in.

Even though the existence of those spatial wards was indisputable, they were invisible to the naked eye. Qi warriors with cultivation bases lower than the Soul realm wouldn't even be able to sense their existence.

The multiple wards cloaked Zhao Shanling's trace, life aura, and soul fluctuations.

Finished with the spell, Zhao Shanling closed his eyes, focusing all of his soul power and spiritual power on manipulating the Death Reign.

The Death Reign was the most curious tool he had ever forged. As long as he remained in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, no matter where he hid, he would be able to manipulate the Death Reign by relying on his profound connection with it.

On the other hand, as a unique spiritual tool, the Death Reign was filled with death power which could wither all plants and extinguish all creatures.

Even he hadn't gained total control of it yet, and thus was unable to fight enemies within it.

Furthermore, he would have to be focused and undisrupted when he wanted to stimulate the Death Reign's might to the fullest.

Only by staying far away from the Death Reign and Qi Bailu's sight would he be able to do that.

That was why he hadn't gone to the Tool Sect with the Death Reign, but rather come here to manipulate it in the dark.

He didn't trust anyone.

Since the relationship between him and the Flame God, Xia Yi, was strictly cooperative, he didn't want anyone to know where he was when he was concentrating on manipulating the Death Reign, lest they take the opportunity to harm him.

Finished with his preparations, Zhao Shanling closed his eyes. "You lot really think those wards can stop my Death Reign from going further? Quit dreaming!"

With a cold snort, he commanded the Death Reign to fly directly into the defensive wards established by the Tool Sect experts.

...

One day later, Nie Tian came to a stop. Looking at the wall fragments before him, he seemed deeply confused. "Where is this place?"

At the foot of extinct volcano lay dozens of dilapidated stone pavilions.

His nine Heaven Eyes circled around in the vicinity and failed to detect any signs of life from the abandoned stone pavilions.

Dong Li glanced around and explained, "I've never been here before, but I'm pretty sure that this used to be the Bone Sect's headquarters. The Bone Sect was a Qi warrior sect. It was said that a foreign Qi warrior discovered the method of practicing the Bonebrutes' special incantations from the ruins of the Bonebrutes' headquarters, which we visited earlier.

"He derived a series of bone-tempering incantations from them, and established his own sect in this place: the Bone Sect.

"Back in those days, the Bone Sect was a very small sect in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. In the eyes of the Tool Sect and

other powerful sects, the bone-tempering incantations he created were nothing but a bunch of heretical cultivation methods.

“Limited by his human features, his bone-tempering incantations didn’t allow him to advance by leaps and bounds in his cultivation.

“Eventually, his cultivation base got stuck at the early Profound realm.

“When Zhao Shanling finished his Death Reign, the Bone Sect was the first place it floated to.

“The entire Bone Sect was annihilated by the Death Reign within an hour. Even their founder was sucked into the Death Reign and died just as miserably as his disciples.

“However, a handful of the Bone Sect members escaped death, for they weren’t in their sect at that time.

“None of the Bone Sect survivors ever rose to prominence after that. They just relied on the bone-refining incantations they practiced to discover the remains of the Bonebrutes and traded them for spirit stones and spiritual materials.”

“I see...” Nie Tian nodded as he continued his search by relying on the faint changes in his bloodline.

Soon, as he wandered through the ruins, the green spots in the crystal-like chains within the green aura started to flicker increasingly frequently.

Nie Tian was thus convinced that the roving, magical place was in the vicinity.

However, as he scanned the area with his nine perceptive Heaven Eyes, he couldn’t find anything noteworthy.

That was when he realized that he could only try to locate that magical place by relying on the level of activity of his bloodline.

Dong Li followed him as he searched, looking extremely bored. She would also complain every now and then that, instead of

wasting their time wandering around, they might as well focus on practicing cultivation and quietly ride out the turbulent situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Before long, Nie Tian found himself by a shallow creek by the foot of an extinct volcano behind the Bone Sect.

As he came to a stop by the unexpected creek, he discovered that the green spots started to shine unprecedentedly dazzlingly.

However, nothing caught his eyes or Heaven Eyes.

Even so, he was convinced that the thing that had been stirring his bloodline was somewhere around here.

With a deep breath, he closed his eyes and conducted an inch-by-inch scan of his surroundings with his Heaven Eyes.

Moments later, he finally discovered something abnormal in the creek.

There seemed to be an invisible object in the quietly flowing creek, creating a small vortex in the flowing water.

However, that mysterious object seemed to disappear in the next moment, along with the vortex.

Not one to easily give up, Nie Tian focused all of his attention on scanning the creek. It wasn't long before he discovered a similar occurrence in a location upstream.

Something seemed to suddenly appear in the creek, creating a quiet vortex.

SHEW!

Like an arrow, Nie Tian blurred into action and leapt towards the forming vortex.

CLATTER!

Water splashed as Nie Tian landed on a rock in the creek, disrupting the vortex. He scanned his surroundings with rapt

attention, but couldn't find anything.

However, as he stood there, his bloodline grew even more active.

That was when he instantly looked up into the sky. A strange feeling struck him.

“Dong Li!” Nie Tian called out. “Summon your black phoenix. I need you to take me into the air!”

Dong Li was deeply confused. “What the hell are you up to?”

“Trust me!” Nie Tian called out again.

“You're crazy!” Dong Li said. Nevertheless, she summoned her black phoenix, walked up to Nie Tian, and took him up into the air.

Nie Tian kept a close watch on the changes in the creek.

As another vortex began forming in the creek, he shouted, “Over there! Let's go!”

WHOOSH!

Like a flash of black lightning, the black phoenix carried him and Dong Li towards the area directly above the vortex in the creek.

In the next moment, Nie Tian and Dong Li felt light-headed, as they found that they had stumbled into a spatial tunnel.

Chapter 448: The Promised Land

BANG! BANG!

Nie Tian and Dong Li fell heavily onto the ground.

The black phoenix let out a screech before morphing into a wisp of black aura and disappearing into Dong Li's head.

Hurting all over from the fall, Nie Tian rose to his feet and exclaimed, "This is it!"

Bearing the pain, Dong Li struggled to sit up. After glancing around, she grew dumbstruck.

She found that she and Nie Tian were in a dark-yellow wasteland. Not a single blade of grass could be seen around them.

However, merely about a thousand meters in front of them was a dense forest, where each and every tree was luxuriant and nearly a hundred meters tall.

Though separated by a thousand meters, she could sense the intense wood power coming from the forest.

With just a whiff of it, Dong Li felt refreshed, as if she was instantly brimming with energy and life force.

Nie Tian looked up and discovered that the sky was filled with light-green auras, like ribbons that were floating in the wind. Meanwhile, faint spatial energy fluctuations were coming from the depths of the aura-filled sky.

That was when he realized that he and Dong Li had probably entered this place through there.

Standing in the wasteland and looking at the forest of ancient, exuberant trees, the sensations Nie Tian was feeling were much more intense than what Dong Li was feeling.

Even though he wasn't moving or doing anything, he could sense the wisps of light-green auras around him being naturally

channeled into himself.

As he examined himself with rapt attention, he discovered that the wisps of light-green auras were rapidly flying into the vortex of wood power in his spiritual sea.

Without him making any effort, his vortex of wood power was already spinning at an alarming speed on its own, absorbing the incomparably pure wood power around him as quickly as possible.

As the vortex continued to refine the newly-acquired wood power, a drop of liquid gradually came to form at the bottom.

Normally, he would need a large number of wood-attributed spiritual materials in order to form a single drop of liquid that contained extremely concentrated wood power.

But now, his vortex of wood power had acted on its own to channel the ribbons of light-green aura and form a drop of concentrated wood power liquid within a very short time.

Dong Li glanced around. “I-is this...?!”

She was still so shocked that she found it difficult to get out a whole sentence.

“That’s right!” Nie Tian said excitedly. “This is the legendary place known by everyone in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, the place where wood power is as thick as water!”

Upon hearing his words, Dong Li’s curvaceous body trembled slightly.

She was still seized by excitement as she asked, “H-how did you find this place, Nie Tian? And what happened just now? Are we still in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?”

“Maybe not!” Nie Tian couldn’t mask his excitement. “The area in the sky I told you to take me to was probably a hidden entrance that led us to this place. That entrance seems to be constantly moving across the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, so it’s very

hard to detect.

“It was mere luck that I was able to discover it.”

“Mere luck?” Dong Li asked with a cold snort. “Are you sure it was mere luck?”

Her eyes shone as brightly as lightning. With a guilty conscience, Nie Tian dropped his head and said, “Yeah.”

“I’m not buying that!” Dong Li shot a glare at him. “At first, you wandered around in the area where the Bonebrutes’ headquarters used to be. Apparently, you were searching for something. I thought you were trying to find some valuable items left behind by the Bonebrutes. I was so naive.

“You were actually searching for this place, am I right?”

“Just now, you discovered some anomalies, and thus told me to summon my black phoenix and carry you into the secret entrance in the sky. Is that it?”

Nie Tian let out a dry laugh and nodded. “Sort of.”

Seeing that he had admitted it, Dong Li’s eyes shone increasingly brightly. “So tell me. How in the world did you find this place? For thousands of years, who knows how many people with little time left have come to roam the barren land in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. They left no stone unturned, yet they failed to find this place.

“How did you manage to find it so soon after coming to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?!”

Dong Li grew more worked up as she spoke. Her scented shoulders trembled, and her eyes became as bright as stars as she stared at Nie Tian.

Nie Tian adopted the same attitude he had always had when she asked questions he didn’t want to answer — silence.

Seeing that he was playing the silence card again, Dong Li gritted

her teeth with anger, yet there was nothing she could do. “Alright. Don’t tell me if you don’t want to!”

After taking a moment to adjust her mind, she gazed off at the forest of towering trees and said, “The wood power is richer over there. Rumor has it that Fruits of Life exist in this magical place. Let’s go and take a look. If we can actually find Fruits of Life here, our trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will prove to be wildly productive!”

In the Domain of the Falling Stars, the Fruits of Life were lifespan-prolonging items that only existed in legends.

Many grand Qi warriors with divine abilities had faced lifespan problems in the evenings of their cultivation careers. Many of them had been willing to give up all of their possessions to gain extra years.

Therefore, she knew very well how precious the Fruits of Life were.

Even the Dong Clan’s patriarch, who was at the Soul realm, was currently worrying about his lifespan running out day and night.

If she were able to take a Fruit of Life back to him, her status in the Dong Clan would immediately rise to a high level, and she would receive handsome rewards from him, who had already placed high hopes in her.

“Fruits of Life!” A shudder ran through Nie Tian’s body as he gazed at the dense forest. He suddenly remembered his master Wu Ji and Hua Mu, who had helped him over and over.

As powerful as they were, the two of them were facing the same impasse as the old man he had encountered earlier; they were nearing the end of their lifespan.

If miracles didn’t happen, they would soon run out of time and die from old age.

However, as a magical item, one Fruit of Life alone would extend

their lifespan by at least a hundred years.

With the extra one hundred years, they would most likely be able to shatter the obstacles in their cultivation and make new breakthroughs, which would extend their lifespan again, allowing them to continue marching down their cultivation paths.

With these thoughts in mind, Nie Tian said, “If the Fruits of Life do exist in that forest, I’ll take two.”

“I’ll take one!” Dong Li exclaimed longingly.

“Let’s hope we’ll be lucky enough to find three Fruits of Life then.” With a smile, Nie Tian attempted to summon his Heaven Eyes to scan the area before him.

However, he discovered that his Heaven Eyes hadn’t followed him into this mysterious dimension.

Also, as he attempted to form new Heaven Eyes, his attempts were disrupted by some kind of unknown force, and thus failed.

He even failed to sense anything as he attempted to scan his surroundings with his psychic awareness.

Frowning, he thought something was wrong with him. “This is strange. I unleashed my psychic awareness, but I can’t sense anything.”

Upon hearing his words, Dong Li also made attempts to sense with her psychic awareness. Then she said, “It’s the same with me!”

After a brief pondering, Nie Tian said, “I suppose it won’t matter, since there don’t seem to be people here anyways. Alright! Let’s go and see if we can find some Fruits of Life in that forest and get them out of this place!”

“Great!” That was when Dong Li realized that the malfunction of their psychic awarenesses might be caused by the special environment.

The two of them rapidly marched forward.

The closer they got to the forest, the more floating ribbons of light-green aura they could see in the air. Nie Tian's vortex of wood power spun madly as it absorbed the pure wood power.

When they arrived at the edge of the forest, Nie Tian faced the enormous, sky-reaching trees and said, "Be careful."

Dong Li nodded with a serious expression, not daring to treat their entrance lightly.

However, as soon as they stepped into the forest and stepped from the dark-yellow, barren land to the green, vegetated ground, an ancient hundred-meter-tall tree that was the closest to them suddenly shook.

In the next moment, its branches seemed to turn into sharp blades, which then pierced directly towards Dong Li.

However, Nie Tian, who was standing right beside her, didn't seem to be the ancient tree's target. Not a single one of the incoming branches was coming at him.

Dong Li's face turn pale with fright as she not only formed a protective ward with her dark spiritual power, but she also took out her bone shield.

CLANK! CLANK! CLANK!

The sharp branches pierced into her bone shield, giving rise to metallic clanking sounds and sputtering sparks.

Dong Li let out a muffled groan, as if she had taken a strong blow. Then, she instantly jumped backwards.

The moment she landed back on the dark-yellow, barren land, the branches that were coming at her froze midway.

Dong Li glared at Nie Tian. "Why aren't you being attacked?"

A puzzled expression spread out on Nie Tian's face as he stood under that enormous tree. Looking at the sharp branches, which

seemed to have lost their target and thus were shrinking back, he said, “I have no idea.”

Chapter 449: Setback

From the moment Nie Tian set foot on the green, vegetated ground, the green aura within his heart started swimming around unceasingly.

The crystal-like chains within the green aura glittered with sparkling light, as if they were tiny snakes that were madly twisting their bodies.

Meanwhile, the innumerable green spots within the crystal-like chains shone with increasingly bright light.

Standing there without moving a hair, Nie Tian felt copious amounts of green, misty energy pouring into his vortex of wood power.

Drops of liquid that were made of concentrated wood essence rapidly came to form at the bottom of his vortex of wood power.

The luxuriant, hundred-meter-tall tree beside him looked like a huge umbrella, blocking almost the entire sky over his head.

Not only did he not feel that it was dangerous standing under the tree, but he even felt rather relaxed, as if the tree was protecting him.

He could vaguely sense that something in the depths of the forest was attracting the green aura in his heart.

“I don’t believe the tree will attack me again!” With these words, Dong Li, who couldn’t find an answer to what had happened just now, once again dashed into the forest.

Staring coldly at the enormous tree, she infused her bone shield with dazzling spiritual power.

Changes occurred again!

The enormous tree, which had turned a blind eye to Nie Tian, once again launched attacks because of Dong Li’s entrance.

One sharp branch after another whizzed directly towards Dong Li before hitting her bone shield, giving rise to loud clanking sounds.

Gritting her teeth, Dong Li struggled to bear the strong impacts and trudge forward, regardless of Nie Tian's incessant calling and dissuasion.

At this moment, an even thicker tree in front of her suddenly started moving.

Its sharp, blade-like branches shot down towards Dong Li as if they were falling from the heavens.

Dong Li raised her bone shield with both hands to fend them off.

CLANK! CLANK!

Repeatedly bombarded by the tree branches, Dong Li started to feel intense soreness and pain in both her hands. Apparently, she was having great difficulty defending herself from the trees' attacks.

Not only did she stop moving forward, but she even started trudging backwards.

Under Nie Tian's gaze, she slowly backed out of the forest. Only then did the tree branches stop attacking her and slowly shrink back.

Standing in the dark-yellow wasteland, Dong Li panted heavily as she stared at Nie Tian and said, clenching her jaw, "Why are they not attacking you?"

With an innocent expression on his face, Nie Tian said, "Perhaps it's because wood power is one of the powers I practice."

"What kind of fool do you take me for?!" Dong Li asked with a cold snort. "For thousands of years, countless people who practiced wood power just like you have come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation during their last years, hoping to find this magical place. Many of them were experts who practiced nothing

but wood power. However, every single one of them died of old age before finding the slightest clue.

“What has allowed you to find this place so easily on your first trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?”

“Don’t you tell me that you discovered this place by relying on the wood power you practice. Lots of them had far superior cultivation bases and understandings of wood power than you.

“They all failed. Why did you happen to succeed?”

Nie Tian rubbed his nose and said with a dry laugh, “Perhaps it’s because I had better luck than they did.”

“Save your nonsense!” Dong Li said with a cold snort.

The tip of Nie Tian’s eyebrow rose as he said, “How about this: Since you can’t seem to enter this forest, I’ll go to the heart of the forest by myself. If I do discover the Fruits of Life in the depths of the forest, I’ll get one for you.”

“Don’t you dare leave me here!” Dong Li strongly disagreed.

Before Nie Tian could open his mouth again, she attempted to summon her black phoenix with a thought, hoping to have the black phoenix carry her over the barrier of enormous trees before her.

However, no matter how hard she tried, the black phoenix didn’t answer her summons.

“Even you are not going to help me?!” Cursing the black phoenix inwardly, she gathered her remaining strength, preparing herself for a third attempt.

After a moment of hesitation, Nie Tian realized that his persuasion had failed, and thus took the initiative to walk out of the forest. “Wait!”

After arriving by Dong Li’s side, he gave a soft laugh and said, “Okay, I’ll see if I can get you inside.”

Dong Li was puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“This forest is bit strange. As you’ve noticed, these enormous trees only attack you, but won’t identify me as a target.” Nie Tian pondered as he spoke. “Why don’t you try to stay close to me?”

He gradually realized that it probably wasn’t because of the wood power in his spiritual sea that he was free from the ancient trees’ attacks.

Just as Dong Li had said, for thousands of years, countless Qi warriors who specialized in wood power had come to search the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, but none of them had actually stepped into this magical land.

That meant that it wasn’t his wood power that had allowed him to discover this place, but rather the green aura in his heart, which contained the profound truths of life.

Similarly, it was also the green aura that had allowed him to enter the forest without having to deal with the gigantic trees’ attacks.

“Stay close to you?” Dong Li went blank for a moment. A rare look flashed across her bright eyes as she asked, “How close?”

“Okay, try to take my hand and stay close to me,” Nie Tian proposed.

Biting her lower lip, Dong Li chuckled softly. “You’re not trying to take advantage of me, are you?”

Nie Tian cleared his throat and glanced at her out of the corner of his eyes, saying, “Considering how you look now, I’m good. Thank you.”

“I see. You don’t like my current face, do you?” Dong Li rolled her eyes and ripped her mask off, revealing her unmatched, beautiful appearance.

With a bright smile, she took the initiative to step over and wrap

her arm around Nie Tian's. "How about now?"

The moment she ripped off her plain-looking mask, Nie Tian's eyes lit up, seized by her bewilderingly charming looks.

As Dong Li spoke, she emitted a pleasant scent, and endless tenderness filled her deep, bright eyes. With a look at them, any man would be enchanted and wish to swim in them forever.

"Better... This is much better." Nie Tian answered subconsciously.

Dong Li suddenly let out a cold harrumph, killing the smiles that were filling her face a moment ago. "Let's go! Remember to protect me. I'll make you pay for it if you dare to use this opportunity to take advantage of me!"

With these threatening words, she dragged Nie Tian towards the lush forest.

She came to a stop when they were only one step away from entering the forest. With a deep breath, they took the final step simultaneously, side by side.

THUMP!

The moment her feet landed on the vegetated ground, tree branches once again shot directly towards her.

Dong Li's expression flickered.

However, Nie Tian noticed that all the branches were aimed at the other side of her body.

The side of her that was clinging to him hadn't become the target of the branches' attacks.

This new finding made him realize that his method would work.

Nie Tian didn't move a single muscle. Looking at Dong Li, who was busy raising her bone shield to fend off the branches, he suggested, "Hey sister, if you can stick your whole body to me, perhaps you won't be attacked anymore."

Dong Li was instantly enlightened.

She also noticed that the sharp branches were only targeting her other half, which was away from Nie Tian.

Just as more incoming branches were about to reach her, she gritted her teeth and made a bashful decision.

She turned her extremely curvaceous body to face Nie Tian's front. With a leap, she spread her limbs and clung to Nie Tian's torso like a baby monkey.

She hooked her arms around Nie Tian's neck, wrapped her slender legs around Nie Tian's waist, and buried her face in Nie Tian's chest as she exclaimed softly, "Put your hands around me!"

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

At that moment, two sharp branches shot directly towards Dong Li's exposed back.

"Hurry!" Dong Li urged.

Nie Tian snapped back to his senses, gently wrapped his thick arms around Dong Li's tender back, and stared coldly at the two approaching branches.

Surprisingly, the moment he put his arms around Dong Li, the branches froze in the air, only inches away from piercing into Dong Li's back.

They stayed in the air, completely motionless, as if they were searching for something.

At this moment, Dong Li was curling up in Nie Tian's chest, her arms and legs wrapped around Nie Tian's neck and waist like snakes.

She was both bashful and fearful, fearing that the branches might find something and continue attacking her.

After a while, the two branches seemed to have lost their target and thus shrunk away from them.

Upon seeing the branches shrinking back, Nie Tian, who was just as nervous, let out a sigh of relief. Looking down at the woman who was clinging to him in a weird position, he said, “That was a smart move.”

Like conjoined twins, the two of them were stuck closely to each other, including their arms and legs.

At first glance, they looked like one person.

“Hurry! Take me to the heart of this forest to find the Fruits of Life!” Burying her head in Nie Tian’s chest, Dong Li listened to his throbbing heart, and for the first time, felt butterflies in her stomach. She didn’t even dare to look up at Nie Tian’s taunting expression. Instead, with great force in her voice, she said, “I won’t let you off if you dare to take advantage of me! Do you hear me?!”

“What?! You’re taking advantage of me, alright?!” With a broad laugh, Nie Tian strode towards the depths of the forest.

Chapter 450: Fruits of Life

In the forest of sky-reaching trees, Nie Tian held Dong Li in an awkward position as they slowly moved forward.

At first, Dong Li buried her head in Nie Tian's chest, fearing that the enormous trees would attack her again.

However, as Nie Tian walked deeper into the forest, she found that the trees were not attacking her anymore, and thus gradually relaxed.

Even still, she silently clenched her jaw as she stuck close to Nie Tian's chest and listened to his vigorous heartbeat.

The position made her very bashful and uncomfortable. She was constantly guarding against Nie Tian, fearing that he would take the opportunity to do unspeakable things to her.

She couldn't help but recall their close contact in the dense forest in the Realm of Split Void and over the lake in the Realm of Dark Underworld. Images flashed in front of her eyes.

Gradually, she realized that she actually didn't oppose close contact with Nie Tian, which deeply shocked and abashed her.

She even blamed herself for it inwardly.

Being so close to Nie Tian, not only was she able to hear his heartbeat, but she was also able to smell his aura, which only strong males would have.

Listening to his heartbeat and smelling his aura, Dong Li couldn't help but feel unprecedentedly secure, as if as long as they remained in this position, nothing would ever happen to her.

As for Nie Tian, who was marching forward, he quickly adjusted himself after being carried away briefly.

As he pondered what had just happened, he gradually realized that the reason why the ancient trees had stopped attacking Dong

Li was probably because she had been submerged in the special aura he emanated.

The aura he released into his surroundings originated from his flesh and blood, which carried a bit of the aura of his bloodline.

It was none other than this special aura that had allowed him to be free from the trees' attacks, which had the same effect for Dong Li when she stayed close enough to him.

"Life Bloodline and the Fruit of Life..." Nie Tian was increasingly convinced that there were certain profound connections between the two.

His bloodline was the reason why he had successfully found this place and not been attacked by the enormous trees.

Looking up at the hundred-meter-tall trees, he felt very secure and relaxed. As he walked deeper into the forest, the light-green wood power aura in the air grew increasingly pure and rich.

Wisps of pure wood power continued to pour into his spiritual sea, forming more liquidized wood power at the bottom of his vortex of wood power.

He started to have a feeling that as long as he stayed in this magical place, even if he didn't do anything, the level of development of his vortex of wood power and the level of refinement of his wood power would rise to the point where he would be ready for his next breakthrough.

It wasn't an intangible rumor that the wood power here was as thick as water. It was solid truth.

Just like that, Nie Tian carried Dong Li closer and closer towards the heart of the forest, neither of them saying a word.

From time to time, Nie Tian would glance around, and discover that long, thin roots stretched from the bottoms of the trees towards the heart of the forest.

After marching for a few hours, Nie Tian arrived at the heart of the forest with Dong Li clinging to him, where he discovered that the roots of the ancient trees were actually stretching into a shallow pond, which was filled with murky, green water.

In the middle of the pond grew a short tree that was about a man's height with green leaves.

The small tree had only the girth of a grown man's arm. Its trunk was covered in complicated and mysterious patterns, which glittered with faint, green light.

In its fresh, green foliage hung four fist-sized fruits.

The fruits were translucent and sparkling like emeralds, with green light rippling in them, as if they were filled with the most profound power in heaven and earth — life power.

Arriving by the edge of the shallow pond, Nie Tian finally came to a stop, his eyes seized by the small tree and the four fruits on it.

At this moment, he sensed with great clarity that the green aura in his heart wanted to rush out of his body, each and every crystal-like chain within it shining with dazzling light.

The green aura followed his meridians straight into his right palm.

As it did, his right palm began to change. The palm prints on his right palm began to flicker with faint, green light, just like the patterns on the trunk of the short tree.

The green aura rushed about within his palm, though it didn't seem to be able to fly out through his fingertips.

However, a strong, mysterious yearning stemmed from the green aura and seemed to be urging Nie Tian to collect those four emerald-like fruits.

Nie Tian took deep breaths to calm himself as he said to Dong Li, "I-I think this is the place."

Upon hearing his words, Dong Li, whose head was still buried in Nie Tian's chest, lifted her head and started to glance around cautiously.

She soon turned around and discovered the mysterious, short tree Nie Tian was facing.

Her gaze switched back and forth between the shallow pond, the small tree in it, and the four fruits hanging in the small trees.

In the next moment, Dong Li's charming body, which was still curled up in Nie Tian's arms, trembled violently with excitement. "Fruits of Life! There are four of them!"

Eyes on the short tree, Nie Tian said, "If those are the Fruits of Life, then that's a Tree of Life! Do you know anything about Trees of Life?"

Song Li shook her head and said, with her eyes also on the short tree, "I don't know. I just know that Fruits of Life grow on Trees of Life. I don't know anything about what they are and why they exist."

With these words, she started shouting, "Nie Tian! There are four Fruits of Life here! I'll just take one. After I take it back to the patriarch of my clan, my status in the Dong clan will become rock steady! From then on, no matter what our patriarch awards me, those people in my clan won't ever dare to talk behind my back again!"

The fact was that the patriarch of the Dong Clan had adored her since she had been little. Her black phoenix had been captured by him and given to her as a gift.

However, every clan had their rules. Even as the patriarch, he couldn't favor Dong Li too much and pour the Dong Clan's resources in her direction just because he liked her.

Therefore, in order for Dong Li to rise above others in the Dong Clan, she would have to prove her strength and resourcefulness to

her clansmen.

This was a rule set by the Dong Clan's ancestors. Even the patriarch had to live by it.

However, it would be completely different if Dong Li could bring back a Fruit of Life and use it to extend their patriarch's lifespan.

The Fruits of Life were legendary items throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars. By bringing back a Fruit of Life, Dong Li would prove her capability and make a great contribution to her clan. Her patriarch would be free to shower her with gifts, and the others wouldn't have anything to say.

Nie Tian's eyes lit up. "Four Fruits of Life!"

Dong Li would take one, which meant that other than the two he planned to give Wu Ji and Hua Mu to solve their lifespan problem, he would still have one left.

With these thoughts in mind, he couldn't wait anymore, and prepared to collect them right away.

Dong Li had calmed down after her moment of excitement, and said, "Be careful. Let's see if there are any special deployments around here. The most amazing treasures usually come with the most deadly threats. You saw yourself how those huge trees turned into killing machines."

She had heard so many stories regarding precious treasures that were the essence of heaven and earth. Every single one of them were closely related with deaths.

Places that produced rare treasures were either overseen by vicious creatures, sealed by mysterious spell formations, or in disorderly spatial regions.

She was worried that danger would appear and devour them as soon as Nie Tian went to collect those Fruits of Life.

Upon hearing her words, Nie Tian grew more meticulous and

vigilant against danger that could appear at any moment.

Even though he was only one step away from entering the pond, he didn't take that step forward.

After measuring the distance between him and the tree with his eyes, he pondered briefly and said, "I'll jump over to the Tree of Life and collect the Fruits of Life while I'm in the air."

With these words, he started to form a chaotic magnetic field around him for protection purposes.

However, as soon as he summoned his various types of power to form the chaotic magnetic field, he seemed to anger something in this mysterious place.

The moment his special aura was masked by his forming chaotic magnetic field, the ancient trees around the shallow pond started attacking him, as if they had gone mad.

Thousands of branches, which looked like sharp blades, and vines that looked like long whips started storming towards him.

The aura from those branches terrified Nie Tian. Looking at the incoming storm of branches, he felt that there was no way that he could defend against them, and that he would be killed in the next moment.

Dong Li saw the problem and thus hastily yelled, "Wrong move! Don't do anything! Lose your defenses, just like you did before!"

Nie Tian was instantly enlightened.

Before the branches could reach him, he canceled the chaotic magnetic field around him.

The moment his chaotic magnetic field was lifted, the branches that were raining towards him froze in the air.

A dozen of them were only a few inches from his neck, while another one had almost pierced into Dong Li's forehead.

Nie Tian and Dong Li were surrounded by countless frozen

branches, as if they were trapped by thousands of floating wooden spears. With one wrong move, they would be impaled and killed.

The two of them stiffened in fear. Looking at the sharp branches that were only inches away from their skin, they didn't dare to move a hair.

Chapter 451: The Eye of a Titan

The branches that were hovering around Nie Tian and Dong Li seemed to be even sharper than metal spears, making them shudder with terror.

Dong Li slowly shrunk back into Nie Tian's chest and said in a low voice, "I beg you not to make another rash move, okay?!"

With a grim expression, Nie Tian was once again releasing his special aura into his surroundings now that the chaotic magnetic field was no longer being channeled.

The aura of his flesh and blood, which was invisible to the naked eye, quietly dispersed and filled a small area around him and Dong Li.

SHEW! SHEW! SHEW!

The sharp branches that had nearly riddled them with holes rapidly shrunk back toward the ancient trees, as if nothing had happened.

Only after she was convinced that the crisis was over did Dong Li lift her head again.

Her face was ghastly with fright and her voice was trembling with fear. "This place is so strange. Using spiritual power with the wrong attribute will immediately trigger great changes. I beg you not to make any more rash attempts!"

Nie Tian realized what had just happened after surviving the sudden change.

Therefore, he deliberately suppressed all other types of power within him, wood power being the only exception. Meanwhile, he made sure that he was constantly wreathed in his faint aura of flesh and blood.

Soon, the comfortable and secure feeling came back to him.

That was when he became convinced that his special bloodline was the fundamental reason why he was able to roam this forest without being attacked by the ancient trees.

Looking down at his glowing right palm and the green aura that seemed to be trying to break free from it, Nie Tian was absorbed in thought.

Dong Li, who didn't notice the changes in his right hand, once again gazed towards the Tree of Life in the middle of the shallow pond. Eyes fixed on the glittering, emerald-like Fruits of Life, she said in a low voice, "I think you'd better hurry if you want to pick them. I don't think it's wise for us to stay here any longer than we have to."

Nie Tian calmed down and said forcefully, "Alright! Hold onto me!"

Dong Li did as she was bid.

She knew very well that she could only depend on Nie Tian to survive this increasingly scary place.

Once she was separated from Nie Tian, the ancient trees would immediately rain attacks on her. Considering her current cultivation base and strength, she wouldn't even last a minute.

Seeing that Nie Tian was ready to make the jump towards the Tree of Life, she prepared herself as well.

"Now!" With a soft exclamation, Nie Tian leaped into the air towards the center of the pond.

Since the pond only covered an area that was about a thousand square meters, it would be rather easy for Nie Tian to jump across it, even with Dong Li clinging to him.

The only tricky matter would be collecting the Fruits of Life with lightning speed as he flew past the Tree of Life.

"Hmm?!" However, as he leaped into the air and approached the

Tree of Life, his expression flickered.

The gravitational field over the pond was completely different from that in the rest of the forest.

A mysterious force seemed to be supporting him and Dong Li, allowing them to float in the air. Therefore, he slowed down and stopped in the air by the Tree of Life, where the green, translucent Fruits of Life were within arm's reach from him.

“Interesting. The situation here is similar to the situation above that lake in the Realm of Dark Underworld.” Dong Li was amazed by what was happening. Staring at one of the Fruits of Life, she reached out to grab it.

As her milky-white hand slowly left Nie Tian's aura of flesh and blood and approached that Fruit of Life, it didn't incur attacks from the ancient trees.

Nie Tian noticed Dong Li's action. He was deeply surprised as he glanced around at the sky-reaching trees and discovered that they didn't launch attacks.

It was as if the region he and Dong Li were in was already beyond the ancient trees' attack range, a completely different region.

After coming to this realization, he looked down and said to Dong Li, “You can get down now.”

“What?” Dong Li jerked her head around to look at him, confused.

“It seems that this region is out of those ancient trees' attack range,” Nie Tian explained.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

Dong Li, who had remained in this bashful position for a long time, separated herself from Nie Tian slowly and meticulously.

After she climbed off Nie Tian's chest and floated in the air, the

previously scary trees in the vicinity indeed stayed still, just as Nie Tian had said.

Dong Li let out a sigh of relief. Then, eyes shining with the light of excitement, she intended to grab the Fruit of Life that was the closest to her.

Nie Tian, however, didn't make a move. He looked at the Fruit of Life she was going to take with rapt attention.

"Wait!" Nie Tian yelled.

Startled, Dong Li stopped and turned around to look at him. Confused, she asked, "What now?"

Eyes wide, Nie Tian stared down at the murky, green water underneath them. "Look! Down in the pond!"

Dong Li followed his gaze and looked down.

At this moment, ripples appeared in the water of the murky pond.

Oddly, the ripples didn't start from the center of the pond, but rather from the shore where he and Dong Li had come from, and were spreading towards the shore across from it.

Wherever the ripples spread, the originally murky water became clear.

What was even more surprising was that, as the water cleared, a gigantic, green, crystal-like object gradually appeared at the bottom of the pond, and started to emanate a bright light.

Soon, the ripples reached the other side of the pond, like gradually lifting a veil from over the pond.

The green, crystal-like object was now fully revealed.

It was a green, spherical, crystal-like object, which almost filled the entire pond. The Tree of Life was rooted in its top that rose slightly out of the pond.

At that moment, a formidable aura of life suddenly burst forth from under Nie Tian and Dong Li.

Dong Li's gorgeous face turned pale with fright. "Nie Tian, that... that's an eye! The Tree of Life is growing out of a gigantic eye!

"Dear lord! What the hell is this place!? What kind of creature has such a huge eye!? And it can even give birth to a Tree of Life?!"

Nie Tian instantly realized what had just happened.

The previous ripples of water were actually the eyelid of this huge eye opening.

The so-called Tree of Life was actually rooted in this huge eye.

A scream almost escaped his mouth as he felt the overwhelming aura of flesh and blood that burst forth from under them.

The two of them were instantly submerged in a strong sense of crisis.

At this moment, even the green aura in his palm had become quiet and obedient, no longer yearning for the Fruits of Life.

That was when Nie Tian realized that, if he didn't do anything, perhaps he and Dong Li would be killed in the next moment.

"An eye... A giant eye that hides in the earth..." A train of thoughts flashed across Nie Tian's mind as he floated by the Tree of Life.

All of a sudden, an image that had been imprinted in the depths of his soul suddenly surfaced in his head.

It was an image of the mysterious dimension that the Blood Core and the Flame Dragon Armor had taken him to, where he had sat on the dilapidated alter and glanced at the distant, mountain-like arms sticking out of the earth and pointing towards the heavens.

"Titans!" A shudder ran through Nie Tian's body as he realized that this enormous eye must belong to a Titan.

“If this is one of the Titan’s eyes, does it mean that this entire dimension, including the barren land and the lush forest, is the Titan’s prone body?” As these thoughts entered his mind, he felt that the sense of oppression that almost devastated him and Dong Li was growing stronger and stronger.

At this critical moment, it occurred to him to try to create a chaotic magnetic field around him.

He wanted to see if he could ease the terrifying sense of oppression with the secret magic he had learned from that mysterious dimension.

However, his chaotic magnetic field didn’t seem to change anything.

The overwhelming sense of oppression was still growing stronger. Beside him, Dong Li was already kneeling in midair and short of breath, as if her heart was going to explode.

Anxious, Nie Tian went on to try to form a spiritual energy ball with the secret magic he had learned from that mysterious dimension.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

All of a sudden, the green, ribbon-like auras in the sky started converging on him from every direction.

Not only that, but the fragmented will from the Titan, which seemed to contain a secret magic regarding wood power, started flowing up towards him.

To his surprise, as he formed a spiritual energy ball in his left hand and channeled the gathered green energy and fragmented will into his vortex of wood power, the devastating sense of oppression that had been weighing on him and Dong Li was gradually relieved.

Seeing that this method had worked, he continued to cast the spell as he approached the Tree of Life and reached out to grab one

of the Fruits of Life with his right hand.

Chapter 452: Collection

As soon as Nie Tian's right hand made contact with that Fruit of Life, a strong gravitational force was suddenly born between it and the green aura in his palm.

BANG!

The emerald-like Fruit of Life suddenly began to shine with dazzling light.

Dong Li saw with great clarity that wisps of glowing light were flowing out of that Fruit of Life.

Like water, they rapidly followed Nie Tian's fingers into his palm and disappeared.

The fist-sized Fruit of Life shriveled and became smaller at a speed that could be seen by the naked eye.

At the same time, the green aura in his palm started to exude an incomparably strong aura of life.

Nie Tian could sense with great clarity that the countless crystal-like chains that formed the green aura were channeling and absorbing the wisps of glowing light from the Fruit of Life.

The innumerable green spots in the crystal-like chains, where lay the profound truths of life, started to shine like the stars in the sky.

It seemed that the wisps of glowing light from the Fruit of Life were what the green aura had been yearning for. Now it was devouring them greedily.

Moments later, the Fruit of Life touched by Nie Tian's right hand completely vanished under Nie Tian and Dong Li's gazes, all of the life power it contained consumed by the green aura. Not a shred was left.

Meanwhile, the green aura started to emanate an intoxicating light from his right palm.

However, its thirst for life power didn't seem to be relieved in the slightest now that it had consumed a Fruit of Life.

On the contrary, Nie Tian felt that it had become even more eager and excited, as if it was urging him to collect the other three Fruits of Life.

At that moment, Dong Li seemed to realize what was happening, and thus hastily reminded him aloud, "Don't! Don't touch the Fruits of Life with your hand. Otherwise you'll take away all of the life power in them!"

She didn't know that what had taken away the life power of that Fruit of Life was actually the green aura in Nie Tian's palm.

She just assumed that any living being with flesh and blood would absorb the life power within a Fruit of Life as soon as they touched one.

"That Fruit of Life will give you at least another hundred years of lifespan!" Dong Li exclaimed. "You're still young, and far from facing a lifespan problem. These Fruits of Life are extremely precious. We need to secure the other three!"

Upon hearing her reminder, Nie Tian instantly became clear-headed, remembering that he had long since planned to give two Fruits of Life to Wu Ji and Hua Mu.

Dong Li would also need one in order to stabilize her status in the Dong Clan.

"I see." With a deep breath, he recovered and restrained himself from grabbing the other three Fruits of Life with his right hand.

It was also at this moment that he realized that the spiritual energy ball in his left hand had already gathered a significant amount of pure wood power from the vicinity, as well as fragmented will from the Titan underneath him.

Meanwhile, as he practiced the Qi Refining Incantation, both the wood power and the fragmented will were rapidly infused into his

spiritual sea.

“I’ve got some boxes.” Dong Li slowly approached Nie Tian as she looked carefully at the enormous eye in the pond underneath.

Then, she took out three wooden boxes from within her ring of holding and handed them to Nie Tian. “These three wooden boxes are made of trees that were thousands of years old. They should be able to hold Fruits of Life. You just need to open the box, place it under the Fruit of Life, and then sever the stem with its lid. Just like that, you should be able to collect the rest of the Fruits of Life.”

As the daughter of the Dong Clan’s clanmaster, she had all kinds of wares and treasures in her ring of holding.

At such a critical moment, even though she was also within arm’s reach of the Fruits of Life, she didn’t dare to collect them herself.

The overwhelming aura of flesh and blood that the huge eye had unleashed earlier had deeply scared her.

She had also realized that there must be something very special about Nie Tian that had not only allowed him to find this place and be free from the ancient trees’ attacks, but also given him the ability to silence the overwhelming attacks of the huge eye.

As arrogant as she was, she had to admit that she had nothing to do with the tremendous fortune they were facing now.

Therefore, she realized that perhaps she was fated to witness Nie Tian reap a fortune so vastly great that people would probably not believe her even if she were to tell anyone about it.

Nie Tian grabbed the three wooden boxes as he continued to gather the rich wood power and fragmented will of the Titan into the spiritual energy ball in his left hand. “I’ll give it a shot.”

With his right hand, he opened a wooden box and placed it under one of the Fruits of Life.

As his right hand approached that Fruit of Life, the green aura in his palm once again grew restless, as if its desire was driving it crazy.

Nie Tian knew that once his right hand touched that Fruit of Life, the green aura would immediately suck away every last shred of life power within it.

Therefore, he operated with great caution, making sure his right hand didn't make any contact with the Fruit of Life.

After the Fruit of Life was in the wooden box, he snapped the lid shut with a flick of his finger.

With that, the slender stem connecting the Fruit of Life and the Tree of Life was instantly severed, and the box was sealed with the Fruit of Life in it.

"It worked!" Dong Li exclaimed, as if she was even more excited than Nie Tian. "Go on! Get the other two!"

After boxing that Fruit of Life, Nie Tian could feel that the green aura in his palm was growing anxious and upset.

Ignoring it, Nie Tian rapidly boxed the other two Fruits of Life with the same method.

Realizing that all of the remaining Fruits of Life had been sealed away in wooden boxes, the green aura seemed to be incomparably restless and yearning.

After a moment of silent pondering, Nie Tian threw the three wooden boxes that stored the Fruits of Life into his bracelet of holding.

As soon as the boxes flew into his bracelet of holding, all their aura was cut off.

After a while, unable to sense the aura of the Fruits of Life, the green aura stopped rattling in his right palm and swam back into his heart, as if it had finally given up.

As soon as the green aura went back to his heart, Nie Tian realized that the green spots in those crystal-like chains had also calmed down.

The green aura coiled up and became silent, as if it had entered another dormant period.

“The life power of one Fruit of Life caused that green aura to lie dormant again...” Nie Tian, who had gone through similar experiences before, shuddered as he immediately realized that the dormant green aura had started digesting the power of that Fruit of Life.

It meant that the green aura had entered another transcending process. Once the process was finished, it would grant him a brand-new bloodline talent!

Seeing that Nie Tian had put the three wooden boxes away into his bracelet of holding, Dong Li hastily reminded him, “Remember! One of those Fruits of Life is mine! You’re going to give me one after we’re out of here!”

“I know....” Nie Tian nodded and stopped thinking about the Fruits of Life. Instead, he looked down at his left hand.

At that moment, rich wood power and fragmented will from the Titan were still converging on the spiritual energy ball in his left hand.

Seeing that he was looking at his hand with a grave expression, Dong Li stopped talking, and watched him in silence.

Moments later, Nie Tian discovered that no more wisps of fragmented will were flying into the spiritual energy ball in his left hand, which meant that he had gathered all of the Titan’s fragmented will into that spiritual energy ball.

Then, he assumed the lotus position in midair and concentrated on operating the Qi Refining Incantation in order to refine and absorb all of the wood power and the Titan’s fragmented will

within the spiritual energy ball.

Eyes wide, Dong Li watched him from the side.

After an unknown period of time, when the spiritual energy ball was refined and vanished, the force that had been holding him up in the air suddenly grew stronger.

The two of them were pushed into the heavens, and shot towards the depths of the green clouds where powerful spatial fluctuations existed.

Beams of light interwove into a web on the surface of the giant eye where the Tree of Life grew, as if the eye were behind what was happening and watching them as they flew away.

After Nie Tian and Dong Li vanished from this mysterious dimension, a long, echoing sigh rang out from the depths of the earth.

Ripples once again spread out across the shallow pond. As the pond became murky and green again, peace was restored to this heaven and earth.

Chapter 453: Renewed Life

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Nie Tian and Dong Li appeared out of nowhere in midair and started plummeting towards the earth.

Dark spiritual power exploded from within Dong Li, and her black phoenix flew out from the top of her head in the next moment.

The black phoenix spread its wings and grabbed her, stopping her from crashing into the ground.

After stabilizing herself, Dong Li immediately communicated with the black phoenix through her thoughts, and then shot towards the falling Nie Tian.

Just before he was going to hit the ground, Dong Li caught him. Then, the two of them landed smoothly with the help of the black phoenix.

Standing on the ground, Dong Li looked up into the sky, still badly shaken.

Nie Tian's eyes also glittered with bright light as he gazed into the sky. After recovering, he took out one of the three wooden boxes and handed it to Dong Li, saying, "This is yours. You deserve it."

Dong Li didn't stand on ceremony. Instead, she grabbed the wooden box without any hesitation and stuffed it into her ring of holding.

She took a deep breath, and her ample chest trembled slightly. After a moment of silence, she said with her eyes narrowed, "We're finally out of that damn place."

Nie Tian nodded. "Yeah, we're quite lucky."

Dong Li smiled heartily as she finally set her heart at ease.

Heedless of the manners a lady should have, she dropped to the ground and flattened. Looking up at the innumerable stars in the sky, she said, “Lucky can’t even begin to describe it. Trips with you are always full of surprises and horror. Before coming to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, I’d never imagined we would have so many strange encounters.”

Even though Nie Tian was brimming with spiritual power, he was rather exhausted mentally after the intense adventure.

He followed Dong Li and lay down shoulder to shoulder next to her, saying, “When we were shot into the sky by the mysterious force from the pond, did you look down from midair?”

With these words, he spared a wisp of thought to examine his vortex of wood power.

In the magical place, he had channeled copious amounts of wood power from the spiritual energy ball he had formed into his vortex of wood power.

At this moment, even though he had already left that place where wood power was as thick as water, his vortex of wood power was still spinning madly, forming drops of liquidized wood power that gathered into a lake at the bottom of his vortex of wood power.

The green lake of concentrated wood essence exuded thriving life force, while a few spots on the lake’s surface glistened with green light.

As the vortex of wood power continued to spin, the glistening spots in the lake seemed to be rearranging to trigger some sort of change.

Those green glistening spots were formed by the fragmented will of the Titan, with some sort of profound magic imbued within them.

Now, as the vortex of wood power continued to spin at a fast speed, the originally disorderly green spots started to realign into a

certain formation.

Nie Tian had a feeling that once those green spots finished reintegrating, he would be able to unveil the mysteries within them with his psychic awareness.

However, he wasn't sure how long this process would take, just as he wasn't sure how long it would take for the dormant green aura to finish refining the power it had absorbed from the Fruit of Life and complete its transcendence.

Gazing into the starlit sky, Dong Li felt as if she had been reborn.

Recalling the vague shape of the magical land she had seen when they had been shot into the sky, she said, "I did. The way I see it, that continent looked like a giant lying supine, just like we are now. The forest we went through was at the giant's chest, and the shallow pond where the Tree of Life grew was one of the giant's eyes."

"Not only did that giant give life to the Tree of Life, but he was also guarding it." With these words, she turned her head to look at Nie Tian, who was lying right next to her. Charming light rippled in her watery eyes as she said, "I believe that even if other people could somehow find and enter that magical place, they still wouldn't be able to collect those Fruits of Life and get out of there alive. Only you can."

When she had reached out to touch one of the Fruits of Life, a formidable aura of flesh and blood burst forth from underneath them and almost instantly crushed her internal organs.

That was when the owner of the eye hadn't even moved a finger.

Judging by the formidable might of the aura unleashed by that giant, even the most powerful Soul realm experts in the Domain of the Falling Stars probably wouldn't be able to snatch those Fruits of Life by force, much less her and Nie Tian.

She had miraculously survived and ended up with one Fruit of

Life due to something mysterious on Nie Tian.

“That continent did look like a giant...” Nie Tian’s eyes couldn’t help but slide to Dong Li’s perky breasts.

“There are so many mysteries in heaven and earth. Who would have thought that the rumor that has existed in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation for so long is actually real? Who would have also thought that magical place was on a giant’s supine body?” With these words, Dong Li shot a glance at Nie Tian, noticing his lustful gaze.

However, having just escaped death and gained a Fruit of Life, she decided to let this one go. “When we were falling from midair, I looked down and noticed that we are in a location close to the Bone Sect, but quite far from the creek we left from.”

Upon hearing her words, Nie Tian turned his head to glance around, and saw nothing but volcanoes that seemed to have gone extinct many many years ago.

Dong Li continued, “The entrance to that magical place must be constantly floating about, instead of staying in one location. No wonder wood power experts from around the Domain of the Falling Stars have sensed the existence of that magical place in different locations.”

Her eyes glittered brightly as she turn her head to look at Nie Tian again. “But in the end, they weren’t as amazing as you are...”

“Perhaps they were able to detect the few wisps of pure wood power that leaked out from the entrance, but none of them could locate the entrance accurately, since the entrance was constantly on the move. By the time they came close to it, it had already floated to another location.”

“I’m just luckier than most people.” Nie Tian tried to muddle through the topic.

Dong Li snorted coldly. “Fine. Don’t talk about it if you don’t

want to, but don't use your good luck nonsense on me again."

At this moment, Nie Tian was struck by a feeling that the connection between him and his nine Heaven Eyes, which hadn't entered the magical land with him, was reestablished.

He tried to guide them with his thoughts.

Even though the Heaven Eyes had lost considerable amounts of psychic and soul power, they gradually flew towards him from a remote location.

As they approached, fragmentary stars flashed in the depths of his pupils, filling the Heaven Eyes with copious soul and psychic power. Once again, they were able to help Nie Tian keep a close watch on everything in his surroundings.

"Who knows how many days we were gone for and what the situation is now in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?" Lying there, deeply relaxed, he started operating the Fragmentary Star Incantation internally to absorb the starlight that was falling from the heavens.

"Who cares. Neither the feud between the Tool Sect and Zhao Shanling, nor those earthflame essence gatherers from the Flame God Sect, are our problem." Dong Li sounded unburdened. "The turbulent situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation might still last for some time, but I think it will come to an end after those from the Flame God Sect have gathered all the earthflame essence they need.

"The Tool Sect's headquarters is protected by a grand spell formation. As powerful as Zhao Shanling's Death Reign is, I doubt it can breach it.

"Even if it does, it will be a war between Zhao Shanling and the Tool Sect. It won't affect many others. Perhaps only some of the equipment forgers who are attending the assessment assembly will be dragged into the mess and killed."

Nie Tian's eyebrows furrowed.

"Who are you worried about?" Dong Li asked with a meaningful smile.

"That fool Li Ye is attending the Tool Sect's assessment assembly, isn't he?" Nie Tian said in a low voice.

"Li Ye?" Dong Li nodded. "Sure. Since the Death Reign is floating towards the Tool Sect's headquarters, it will inevitably pass many volcanoes that the Tool Sect has provided for equipment forgers like Li Ye. But powerful experts from the Tool Sect will definitely try to intercept it to stop it from massacring those innocent people. Even if it turns out that the Tool Sect can't stop the Death Reign, they'll most likely tell the equipment forgers to return to Desolate City and leave via the inter-realm teleportation portal there.

"Meanwhile, the defeated Tool Sect members would probably fall back to their headquarters and hole up behind their grand spell formation.

"However, I have a feeling that the reason why Zhao Shanling has returned and unleashed the Death Reign is because he wants to keep all of the powerful Tool Sect experts busy so that those people from the Flame God Sect will be able to gather earthflame essence uninterrupted. The turbulent situation is not going to last forever.

"Anyway, we don't need to worry too much.

"Also, considering our unimpressive cultivation bases, I don't think it will matter if we run into powerful experts from the Flame God Sect or Zhao Shanling. They probably won't even spare us a glance."

Nie Tian and Dong Li lay on the ground next to each other. Looking up at the starry sky, they chatted idly, enjoying the rare moment of peace.

Deep into the night...

One of Nie Tian's Heaven Eyes caught sight of two familiar

figures dashing near the Bone Sect.

He sprang to his feet and blurted, “How come they’re here?”

Chapter 454: Old Friends from the Blood Sect

“Who are you talking about?”

Dong Li was still lying comfortably on the ground. She shot him a glance out of the corner of her eye, but didn't intend to stand up.

“Two friends of mine from the Realm of Flame Heaven.” Eyes narrowed, Nie Tian controlled that Heaven Eye with his mind to descend to a lower location so that he could get a better view of what was happening.

Under the chilly starlight, Feng Luo from the Blood Sect was struggling to move forward, looking exhausted and covered in blood.

It seemed that he had just gone through a fierce battle. Staggering gashes could be seen under his torn garments.

Yu Tong, who was also a Blood Sect disciple and a long-time opponent of Nie Tian, was running beside him, face ghastly and her red pupils filled with rage.

“The Blood Sect...” After a moment of pondering, he turned to Dong Li, who was still lying on the ground, and said, “This doesn't concern you. You can just stay here and rest. I'll go over and take a look.”

With these words, he prepared to rush to that location.

Seeing that he was so eager to leave without making the situation clear, Dong Li realized that something important might have happened.

Dong Li also rose to her feet. “Forget it. I've got nothing to do here anyways. I'll go with you.”

Nie Tian nodded briefly. “Sure, as you wish.”

Under the night sky, he and Dong Li ran at an alarming speed, rapidly closing in on Feng Luo and Yu Tong.

About a quarter hour later...

As Nie Tian and Dong Li came closer to Feng Luo and Yu Tong, Nie Tian finally learned their situation through that Heaven Eye.

Three Greater Heaven stage white-robed Qi warriors appeared in his Heaven Eyes' perception range. They were chasing after Feng Luo and Yu Tong at full speed.

Two of them were at the middle Greater Heaven stage, while the other was at the early Greater Heaven stage. They all had cold looks in their eyes and were wreathed in strong killing intent.

The swords and spears they were holding seemed to have been made from some sort of special bones and exuded frosty auras.

SHEW!

Nie Tian flashed into appearance in front of Feng Luo and Yu Tong.

As they saw Nie Tian appearing and blocking their escape route, desperation appeared in their eyes.

At this moment, Nie Tian was still wearing the mask Dong Baijie had given him, so neither Feng Luo nor Yu Tong recognized him. They assumed that he was with the other pursuers.

Feng Luo stopped abruptly. Eyes glittering with blood-colored light, he shouted angrily, "Don't you worry that you'll ruin the Bone Sect's name by doing such a despicable thing?!"

Yu Tong's pupils had already assumed the color of blood. Fine, blood-colored light was rising from her hands and wiggling like blood-colored snakes.

From the look of it, she was ready to risk her life by launching the Blood Sect's forbidden techniques.

Having dealt with people from the Blood Sect so many times

before, Nie Tian had a deep understanding regarding every Blood Sect magic.

Not only that, but he had even practiced the Blood Sect's Blood Refining Incantation himself, and used it to refine spirit beast blood to nourish the green aura in his heart.

WHOOSH!

Dong Li flashed into appearance. Standing next to Nie Tian, she looked curiously at the two people before her.

“Here comes another one!” Dong Li's appearance made Feng Luo and Yu Tong increasingly desperate, as if they realized that they weren't going to survive this time.

Just as Feng Luo and Yu Tong were about to stimulate all of their strength to launch the Blood Sect's most powerful forbidden technique, Nie Tian opened his mouth. “What happened?”

Upon hearing his voice, both Feng Luo and Yu Tong went blank briefly.

The voice was very familiar, yet they couldn't think of who it belonged to in that moment.

Seeing that their faces were filled with bewilderment, Nie Tian realized what was confusing them, and thus said, “The Nie Clan, Black Cloud City.”

Back in the Realm of Dark Underworld, Dong Li had told all of her companions from the Realm of a Hundred Battles that Nie Tian had disappeared with the Spirit Pearl. In order to avoid trouble, he didn't want to expose his real identity yet. Hence, he didn't take off his mask in front of Feng Luo and Yu Tong.

A shudder ran through Feng Luo's body as his eyes instantly lit up. “Nie... Nie Tian?!”

Yu Tong's devilishly beautiful eyes also blossomed with bright light. Biting her lower lip, she looked Nie Tian up and down,

looking both shocked and overjoyed.

The two of them had never thought that they would run into Nie Tian in this desolate and uninhabitable area in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

“What’s going on, Uncle Feng?” Nie Tian asked. “Those three chasing after you seem to be members of the Bone Sect. Why are you here having a conflict with people from the Bone Sect?”

Instead of answering his questions, Feng Luo asked, “You’ve entered the Greater Heaven stage, haven’t you?”

Nie Tian nodded. “Yeah, I’m lucky as always.”

Upon hearing Nie Tian’s answer, Yu Tong’s heart was filled with bitterness. “Greater Heaven stage! He has actually entered the Greater Heaven stage!”

A year ago, when he had returned to the Blood Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven, both of them had been at the middle Heaven stage.

She had practiced cultivation day and night over the past year, and finally entered the late Heaven stage. Therefore, she had been quite confident that she should be ahead of Nie Tian on the cultivation base front.

However, who would have thought that when they met again, Nie Tian was already at the Greater Heaven stage?

All these years, she had considered Nie Tian as a target she needed to surpass. It was the thought of beating Nie Tian in a fair battle that had pushed her to practice cultivation with all of her heart.

However, every encounter with Nie Tian had been a heavy blow to her confidence.

“Don’t tell me that I’ll have to live in his shadow for the rest of my life...” Yu Tong was absorbed in her thoughts.

At that moment, Feng Luo turned to Dong Li and asked, “I believe this lady is also at the Greater Heaven stage, am I right?”

Dong Li smiled gracefully, nodding.

“Now we have two Greater Heaven stage helpers!” Feng Luo’s spirit rose as he went on and asked, “Who is this lady to you, Nie Tian?”

Two of the Bone Sect disciples who were chasing after them were at the middle Greater Heaven stage; one was at the early Greater Heaven stage. Meanwhile, Feng Luo was at the middle Greater Heaven stage.

Feng Luo was well-aware that, no matter which stage Nie Tian was at, his cultivation base wouldn’t do justice to his actual battle prowess. He asked about the relationship between him and Dong Li to determine whether she would join the battle so that they could fight their pursuers head-on instead of running.

Upon hearing his question, Yu Tong’s gaze started switching back and forth between Nie Tian and Dong Li.

At this moment, since Dong Li wasn’t wearing a mask, her perfectly curvaceous body and unmatched, gorgeous appearance amazed even Yu Tong.

While she pondered the relationship between her and Nie Tian, her face fell uncontrollably, as if she felt outshone or were blaming herself for something.

With a faint smile on her lips, Dong Li snuck a glance at Yu Tong. Then, before Nie Tian could answer, she put her arm around Nie Tian’s and pressed herself close to him. Looking at Yu Tong, she said with a flaunting tone, “We’re good friends. The very, very good kind.”

Yu Tong lowered her head slightly, as if she were unwilling to make eye contact with Dong Li.

Nie Tian, who was just about to answer Feng Luo, stiffened and

turned to look at Dong Li with a confused look in his eyes.

Dong Li, however, looked very composed and natural. With the hand she used to hook Nie Tian's arm, she secretly pinched Nie Tian with great force.

A painful expression appeared on Nie Tian's face.

"Good! That's good!" Feng Luo nodded repeatedly as he turned to look at Nie Tian. "Let's take care of those three Bone Sect disciples first. I'll tell you what happened after."

Nie Tian nodded. "Sure."

Immediately afterwards, he gazed behind Feng Luo in the direction where those Bone Sect disciples would appear, saying, "You seem to have sustained serious injuries, Uncle Feng. When they arrive, you just handle that early Greater Heaven stage one. Leave the other two middle Greater Heaven stage ones..."

"To us." Dong Li jumped in and finished his sentence.

Feng Luo went blank for a moment. His surprised gaze shifted between Nie Tian and Dong Li, not knowing what to say.

He knew that, considering Nie Tian's actual battle prowess, he should be able to handle a middle Greater Heaven stage opponent single-handedly. However, he knew nothing of Dong Li, and wasn't sure if this radiant, gorgeous woman also possessed battle prowess beyond her cultivation base.

"Don't worry. We'll manage." Smiling, Dong Li glanced at Yu Tong and added, "You just stay here and rest, little sister. After all, your cultivation base is fairly low. Don't overexert yourself and give yourself a relapse, jeopardizing your future cultivation path."

Yu Tong jerked her head up. Glaring at Dong Li, she said, "I'm younger than you, but I've already entered the late Heaven stage, which is only one minor stage lower than yours. When I'm your age, my cultivation base may very well be higher than yours."

“It’s not a big deal for me to fight Greater Heaven stage enemies. I’ll do what I can to help. Don’t you worry about me!”

With these words, she dropped to the ground, summoned her Blood Spirit Pearl, and started casting the Blood Sect’s forbidden technique, Earth Web.

Dong Li chuckled, not angry at all. “Competitive. My type of girl. If that’s the case, please create as much trouble as you can for those men from the Bone Sect.”

“I sure will!” Yu Tong said coldly.

Chapter 455: Remaining Evil from the Bone Sect

Strands of blood-colored light interwove into a web in the depths of Yu Tong's eyes.

As she formed multiple hand seals, her Blood Spirit Pearl also blossomed with dazzling, blood-colored light.

One string of blood-colored light after another flew out from within the Blood Spirit Pearl, wormed their way into the earth, and rapidly spread into the vicinity.

As she launched the Earth Web, Feng Luo repeatedly urged her to stop with a anxious expression on his face.

However, Yu Tong turned a deaf ear to him.

It was also at that moment that Nie Tian sensed through his Heaven Eyes that Yu Tong's inner spiritual power was extremely disorderly as she cast the Earth Web forbidden technique.

After a brief moment of pondering, he realized that, even though Yu Tong seemed uninjured, she was actually in a worse condition than Feng Luo, who himself looked rather bedraggled.

“Stop provoking her!” Nie Tian shot Dong Li a hard look before struggling free from their hooked arms and rushing towards Yu Tong.

He inserted his right hand between Yu Tong's seal-forming hands, and with a flick, interrupted her forming hand seal.

SHEW! SHEW! SHEW!

One string of blood-colored light after another flew back into her Blood Spirit Pearl at a very fast speed.

Yu Tong stared at him, anger filling her ghastly face. “What are you doing?!”

“We don’t need you to finish off those three!” Nie Tian shouted, staring back in her devilishly beautiful eyes. “Get back there and recover!”

Yu Tong fumed with anger. “You!”

Nie Tian continued to stare in her eyes, not uttering a word.

“Alright, Little Tong. Listen to Nie Tian. You’re indeed unfit to fight anymore.” Feng Luo tried to intermeditate.

Off to the side, Dong Li’s lips puckered into a smile, but she didn’t say anything provocative.

Yu Tong and Nie Tian looked each other in the eye for a few seconds before Yu Tong put away her Blood Spirit Pearl, biting her lower lip and not saying a word. As she did, the spiritual power fluctuations on her gradually calmed.

Seeing that she had finally given up, Nie Tian let out a sigh of relief and said, “The Blood Sect has been very kind to me. Now that I’m here, I won’t allow those men from the Bone Sect to hurt you.”

At that moment, a white-robed Qi warrior from the Bone Sect, whose face looked pale-gray, flashed into appearance before them. “That’s a lot of big talk!”

The man’s name was Ji Kuang, a middle Greater Heaven stage cultivator. He didn’t seem nervous at all seeing that now there were two more people beside Feng Luo and Yu Tong.

He had perceived Nie Tian and Dong Li’s existence with his psychic awareness and learned that they were only at the early Greater Heaven stage when he had been two hundred meters away.

Considering that his two friends behind him were respectively at the middle Greater Heaven stage and early Greater Heaven stage, he was very confident that, even with Nie Tian and Dong Li there to help Feng Luo and Yu Tong, he and his friends would easily overtake the four of them, not to mention that Feng Luo and Yu

Tong had already sustained different degrees of injuries, compromising their battle prowess.

Upon seeing Ji Kuang, Nie Tian summoned his Flame Star and lunged forward without thinking. “He’s mine!”

WHOOSH!

As he blurred into action, a chaotic magnetic field spread out, covering a three-meter-radius around him.

Under the night sky, a three-meter-long red, green, and white blade light instantly shot from the tip of the Flame Star, the red part being flame power, the green part being wood power, and the white part being star power.

The three types of spiritual power congealed into a beam of blade light and burst forth from within the Flame Star.

Upon seeing the approaching blade light, Ji Kuang’s expression flickered, and he no longer dared to slight Nie Tian.

“Mountain of Bones!” As soon as Ji Kuang shouted these words with a cold harrumph, hundreds of pale-gray bones flew out of his ring of holding.

In a bedazzling fashion, they rapidly piled into a seven-meter-high mountain of bones.

Each and every bone exuded a gruesome aura that was laced with death power, making the mountain of bones look very dreadful.

BOOM!

The three-meter-long blade light slammed right into the mountain of bones.

Cracking sounds rang out from the every single bone that made up the mountain of bones. Meanwhile, the power of the entire mountain of bones seemed to converge on the point where the Flame Star’s blade light had slammed into it.

CRUNCH!

The Flame Star arrived shortly after and slashed at the same point, creating sputtering sparks.

Upon the second terrifying impact, the seven-meter-high mountain of bones instantly shattered and exploded, reduced to lifeless bones scattered on the ground.

Ji Kuang's expression flickered as he let out a muffled groan, saying, "Quite impressive, kid! It's hard to believe that someone who practices three types of power at the same time can enter the Greater Heaven stage at your age!"

After trudging three steps backwards, he wove his hand in the air to form different hand seals.

As he channeled them with his spiritual power, the scattered bones swirled up from the ground and piled into another mountain of bones in midair.

The reformed mountain of bones was still seven meters high. However, it didn't remain still, but rather was slowly revolving vertically.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

At that moment, the other two Bone Sect Qi warriors arrived. One stood to Ji Kuang's right while the other stood to his left.

With a frown, Ji Kuang said, "Tao Pu, you go and take care of Feng Luo from the Blood Sect. Ping Yao, those two women are yours."

Just like him, Tao Pu was also at the middle Greater Heaven stage. With a quick nod, he stepped towards Feng Luo, holding a bone sword in his hand.

"You'll have to get through me first!" With these words, Dong Li chuckled and jumped towards Tao Pu with the lightness of a feather. She took out her cyan awl in midair and thrust it down towards the top of Tao Pu's head without the slightest mercy.

Meanwhile, Feng Luo gritted his teeth, glaring at Ping Yao. After gulping down a Blood Strengthening Pill, he morphed into numerous blood-colored shadows and swooped forward.

Yu Tong stood in place and didn't make any rash moves, though she secretly channeled her spiritual power, preparing herself for action.

Seeing that Tao Pu and Ping Yao had both made their moves, Ji Kuang stared at Nie Tian with a grim expression and reasoned, "You're not Blood Sect disciples. Why don't you mind your own business? If you leave now, I might leave one side of the net open for you. (Idiom: to give one's opponent a way out) Otherwise..."

After their first exchange, he had already realized that this unimpressive young man before him was actually quite hard to deal with.

He had also realized that the gorgeous Dong Li wasn't a piece of cake either, after seeing her flying towards Tao Pu with her cyan awl.

After discovering that Nie Tian and Dong Li's battle prowess was actually beyond his estimation, he thought he might adopt a different approach: talking them into leaving.

Nie Tian grinned. "What? Otherwise, you'll kill us as well? You really think you can do that?"

Ji Kuang gave a cold harrumph. "That's right."

At this point, he realized that this young man before him was determined to help those two Blood Sect disciples, and thus no longer wasted his breath.

All of a sudden, the seven-meter-high mountain of bones flew towards Nie Tian, still spinning.

CRACKLE! CRACKLE!

Strange sounds echoed out from each and every bone within that

mountain of bones.

In the next moment, the whole mountain of bones exploded violently, sending a storm of bone spears and shards towards Nie Tian.

At the same time, Ji Kuang let out a sharp shriek, which contained his psychic power and aura of death. The shriek was aimed at Nie Tian's soul.

He launched these attacks very abruptly, without the slightest warning.

By the time Nie Tian realized what was happening, hundreds of gruesome, sharp bones were already right before his eyes.

However, Ji Kuang's attack with his psychic power and aura of death didn't seem to create the slightest turbulence after reaching Nie Tian's soul. On the contrary, they were annihilated with a flicker of the nine fragmentary stars.

"Starshift!" Star power burst forth from within Nie Tian, and he vanished from the location where he had previously stood unwavering.

POOH! POOH! POOH!

Hundreds of pale-gray bones pierced into the ground where he had stood a moment ago, like a forest of swords.

Ji Kuang gasped at the unfavorable situation.

However, just as he was about to turn around and run, he sensed that his spiritual power had become incredibly disorderly. Even the wisps of psychic power within his soul felt as if they had become tangled up into a mess, giving him a splitting pain in the head.

A moment later, an excruciating pain came from his back.

He lowered his head and saw a blade sticking out of the middle of his chest.

“Shit, I can’t believe he almost got me,” Nie Tian muttered.

Chapter 456: A Difficult Situation

Ji Kuang had been able to form a mountain of bones and turn it into a storm of bone spears with his exquisite magics.

Coupled with his immense psychic power attack, he had almost gotten Nie Tian.

If Nie Tian didn't have the nine fist-sized fragmentary stars in his soul, and hadn't mastered the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace's Starshift technique, he might have already been badly injured or killed.

Nie Tian, who had already grown used to killing opponents with higher cultivation bases than his, thought he would have been able to overtake this man with ease, relying on his formidable battle prowess.

Therefore, he hadn't gone all-out or exercised discretion when the battle had first started.

This battle taught him an important lesson: every Qi warrior might have their trump card. If he didn't treat every battle seriously in the future, he would probably suffer great losses.

After pulling the Flame Star out from Ji Kuang's back, he gazed over at Dong Li and Tao Pu, who were now engaged in a fierce battle.

Dong Li was smiling as she brandished her cyan awl.

WHOOSH!

The shadow of the black phoenix suddenly flashed across the depths of her pitch-black pupils.

As it did, strange psychic power fluctuations instantly shot into Tao Pu's mind.

Tao Pu's shifting body suddenly stiffened; the look in his eyes also froze.

Dong Li curled her lips and said, “It’s laughable that the Bone Sect’s little remaining evil actually dares to make waves in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

Then, she took the opportunity, while Tao Pu was temporarily bewildered, infused her cyan awl with her dark spiritual power, and drove it into Tao Pu’s body.

Tao Pu’s airborne body shuddered in midair and then plunged to the ground.

FIZZ!

Like black flames, wisps of dark spiritual power consumed Tao Pu within seconds.

Just like that, the middle Greater Heaven stage Tao Pu was killed by Dong Li in a battle that turned out to be quite short.

Ping Yao, who was fighting Feng Luo, saw that Nie Tian and Dong Li had killed Ji Kuang and Tao Pu effortlessly. His face turned pale with fright.

Without any delay, he ended his battle against Feng Luo and fled in the direction he had come from.

Feng Luo, who had swallowed a Blood Strengthening Pill, was wreathed in a rich, bloody aura, and his eyes were also filled with sinister strands of blood.

Watching Ping Yao flee, Feng Luo panted heavily, as if he were hesitating over whether he should go after him.

“You have things to talk about. Leave him to me.” With a chuckle, Dong Li flashed gracefully after Ping Yao like a dancing butterfly.

Ping Yao’s cultivation base was one minor stage lower than that of Tao Pu, the man she had just slaughtered. Furthermore, she hadn’t even summoned her black phoenix yet.

Perfectly aware of her cunning and vicious nature, Nie Tian

didn't show the slightest intention of helping her, watching her dash after Ping Yao. In his eyes, Ping Yao was already a dead man.

Struggling to stabilize the surging bloody aura inside of him, Feng Luo looked down at Ji Kuang's corpse. "Awesome, Nie Tian! I knew you could kill him. You were able to kill the Yuan Clan's clanmaster in Black Cloud City when you were only at the Heaven stage. It must have been a piece of cake for you to kill this bastard now that you've entered the Greater Heaven stage.

Yu Tong stepped over and asked concernedly. "Are you okay, Uncle Feng? I saw that you consumed a Blood Strengthening Pill."

Feng Luo waved his hand and forced a smile onto his face. "I'm okay. It's just that I'm afraid I won't be able to fight within a period of time. But now that Nie Tian is here, I finally don't have to worry about your safety anymore. It's just that the sectmaster and your master. They..."

He shook his head, laden with worry.

A surprised expression spread across Nie Tian's face. "Sectmaster Li is also in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?"

Feng Luo smiled bitterly. "She's trapped in the Bone Sect's ruins, which is not far from here."

"What happened?!" Nie Tian asked with a grim expression.

He had always had good feelings towards the Blood Sect.

Back when he had vanished from the Blood Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven years ago, they had taken in An Shiyi and An Ying, who hadn't been able to make a living in the Spiritual Treasure Sect anymore, which had been a big favor to him.

Aside from that, Li Jing had also taught him the Blood Refining Incantation, which was one of the Blood Sect's secret magics. She had even expressed that she would allow Nie Tian to take away the Bone Blood Demon that he had awakened.

Therefore, it was understandable that he was deeply concerned after hearing that Li Jing and Shen Xiu had run into trouble in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Feng Luo sat down directly and explained, “We didn’t come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to attend the Tool Sect’s assessment assembly this time. After all, we have very few equipment forgers in our sect. We came for the corpse of a Bonebrute. Our sectmaster received word that surviving members of the Bone Sect had discovered the corpse of a powerful Bonebrute, so we came to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in an attempt to purchase it.

“Our sectmaster only agreed for Little Tong and I to tag along so that Little Tong could broaden her horizons at the assessment assembly.

“Ji Kuang, the man you just killed, met us in Desolate City. It didn’t take long for him and our sectmaster to agree on the price, but he proposed that we complete the transaction in the Bone Sect’s ruins with the excuse that the Bonebrute’s corpse would attract too much attention if they brought it to Desolate City.

“Our sectmaster had heard that the current Bone Sect was nothing but a bunch of headless cultivators, without a single Profound realm expert among them, and thus agreed to go.

“However, when we arrived at the Bone Sect’s dilapidated headquarters, we discovered that wasn’t the case at all.

“Not only was one of them at the Profound realm, but they had even invited another Profound realm expert. The two of them wanted to team up and kill us all among the Bone Sect’s ruins.

“The two of them were both at the middle Profound realm, which is the same as our sectmaster.

“Our sectmaster had to deal with them single-handedly. She was in a very unfavorable situation. Even though Elder Shen was also

there, she couldn't do much to help. Our sectmaster risked her life to distract the two Profound realm experts and create a escape path for me and Little Tong.

“However, on our way out of the Bone Sect's ruins, we ran into Ji Kuang and the other two, who were waiting at the perimeter.

“That was when we realized that the reason why those two Profound realm experts didn't do their utmost to stop us was because they had deployed others at the perimeter.”

Feng Luo's expression grew graver as he continued, “If we didn't happen to run into you, Little Tong and I would have been done for.

“Apparently, those bastards from the Bone Sect didn't plan to do business with us at all. They only lured us there to rob us of our valuable belongings.”

After hearing Feng Luo's description of the events, Nie Tian's eyebrows knitted, not sure what to do.

Even though he had successively saved Feng Luo and Yu Tong, he knew he wouldn't be able to provide Li Jing and Shen Xiu with much help in their battle against those two Profound realm experts.

After all, the Profound realm was the highest realm the experts from the Realm of Flame Heaven had ever achieved. Even in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, Profound realm experts should be among the most powerful Qi warriors.

There were two major stages between the Greater Heaven stage and the Profound realm. Even though he possessed the Flame Dragon Armor and a number of special techniques, he wouldn't stand a chance fighting even the weakest Profound realm expert.

He was fully aware of this.

Meanwhile, both Feng Luo and Yu Tong knew that as powerful as Nie Tian was, it would be almost impossible for him to help Li Jing

and Shen Xiu in their difficult battle. Therefore, they both remained silent.

“Sorry, as much as I want to help Sectmaster Li, I...” Nie Tian sighed, deeply frustrated.

“You don’t need to blame yourself.” Feng Luo said with a pale face. “We understand. I just hope that, now that our sectmaster and Elder Shen don’t need to worry about us anymore, they can break free from the joint attacks of those two Profound realm experts and escape with the help of her Blood Lotus.”

With a sigh, he added, “The Realm of Flame Heaven is too weak after all. We haven’t even produced a single Soul realm expert yet. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have been stomped on by a crappy sect like the Bone Sect.”

Nie Tian’s eyebrows rose as he asked, “Did you notice any anomalies when you left Desolate City? Did you see the Death Reign or Flame God Sect experts fighting Tool Sect experts on your way to the Bone Sect?”

Looking puzzled, Feng Luo said, “No, we intentionally steered clear of the cluster of volcanoes the Tool Sect had set aside for the assessment assembly. We took a detour to avoid attracting attention from the Tool Sect, so it took us a while to get to the Bone Sect.”

“What’s a Death Reign? And why would the Flame God Sect fight the Tool Sect?” Apparently, Feng Luo had no idea regarding the turmoil that was happening in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

At that moment, Dong Li’s voice rang out, “You actually made a nice move by taking a detour.”

After returning to Nie Tian’s side, she took out a piece of white gauze to wipe off the blood on her cyan awl. “If you chose to go through that cluster of volcanoes, you’d most likely have run into

the Death Reign. If you did, none of you would have even made it to the Bone Sect.”

Nie Tian took a glance at her and knew that she must have finished off Ping Yao.

Failing to think of a plausible rescue method, Nie Tian chose to turn to Dong Li for help. “You’re always full of stratagems. Can you help me think of a way to help my two revered seniors from the Blood Sect? If you can help me this time... I’ll owe you another favor. What do you say?”

Dong Li rolled her eyes at him and said with a sarcastic laugh, “Not calling me cunning or vicious this time, huh?”

Nie Tian was slightly embarrassed.

Instead of continuing to taunt Nie Tian, Dong Li pondered for a while and said, “There is a way that might work.”

Nie Tian’s eyes lit up as he hastily asked, “What’s that?”

Chapter 457: Placing the Blame

Dong Li didn't reply immediately.

Instead, under Nie Tian's puzzled gaze, she picked up and put away Tao Pu's bone sword and ring of holding.

Then, she took Ji Kuang's ring of holding and stuffed it into a fine leather pouch on her waist.

Just like that, Nie Tian, Feng Luo, and Yu Tong watched her openly collect the loot from the men she and Nie Tian had killed, not saying a word.

Feng Luo and Yu Tong were aware that if it weren't for Nie Tian and Dong Li, the three of them wouldn't have survived Ji Kuang and the other two. Therefore, they naturally didn't harbor any desire to split the loot.

Furthermore, Li Jing and Shen Xiu were still in danger. They weren't in the mood to concern themselves with such insignificant matters.

The reason Nie Tian didn't say anything either was because Dong Li hadn't been obliged to help him kill those three Qi warriors from the Bone Sect, yet she had. Hence, he considered their belongings as Dong Li's reward.

Not to mention that he was still counting on Dong Li to think of a way to save Li Jing.

After gathering Tao Pu and Ji Kuang's valuables in a grand fashion, Dong Li stepped into the forest of sharp, pale-gray bones that had plunged deeply into the ground.

She waved at Nie Tian, and Nie Tian walked over to her side.

Confused, he looked at her and said with an urgent tone, "Sister Dong, Sectmaster Li is probably being attacked by two Profound realm experts at this very moment. I beg you to hurry and tell me

about your idea, if you have one.”

A bright smile appeared on Dong Li’s face, as if she enjoyed Nie Tian’s pleading very much. “Don’t stop. Beg me some more.”

A tiresome expression filled Nie Tian’s face.

“Hahaha.” With a soft chuckle, Dong Li pulled one of the bone spears out of the ground. Handing it to Nie Tian, she said, “These bones seem to have been refined with a special method using broken bones from Bonebrutes. Have you noticed that every one of them still has a small amount of residual death power in them?”

Without reaching out to receive the bone, Nie Tian nodded and said, “I don’t have to check them to know that they carry residual death power.”

Back when he had been at the Blood Sect, he had awakened that Bone Blood Demon with his own blood.

Later, he had learned from Li Jing that the Bonebrutes, who used to be the overlords of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, carried a bloodline that held the profound truths of death power.

Ji Kuang and his friends were from the Bone Sect. The incantations they practiced had been derived from the Bonebrutes’ profound incantations.

Perhaps that was why, when Ji Kuang had unleashed a psychic attack, it had been laced with death power.

As Dong Li collected the bone spears and put them away in her ring of holding one after another, she said, “People speculated that Zhao Shanling forged the Death Reign with a treasure that used to belong to the Bonebrutes. The Death Reign is an extremely complicated creation that is powered by death power. Even Zhao Shanling himself hasn’t gained full control of it.

“That was why we didn’t discover any sign of Zhao Shanling within or anywhere near the Death Reign when we saw the Death Reign floating towards the Tool Sect.

“This means Zhao Shanling and the Death Reign are in separate locations.”

Nie Tian nodded. “It appears so.”

However, he still didn’t understand how this was related to rescuing Li Jing.

After storing all of the bone spears in her ring of holding, she spoke a faster speed. “After all, Zhao Shanling isn’t a Bonebrute, so he can’t go into the Death Reign himself. However, he has to remain in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in order to manipulate the Death Reign. Even as the creator of the Death Reign, he can’t control it from another realm, across an endless void.

“Also, I suppose he can’t be disturbed when he’s manipulating the Death Reign, so he has to be hiding somewhere in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

“Whether powerful experts from the Tool Sect can stop the Death Reign or not, they must be trying their best to find Zhao Shanling. Once they do and attack him, they’ll be able to deal a heavy blow to him directly, and the Death Reign will be disabled.”

After a brief pause, Dong Li gave a sly smile and continued, “The incantations the Bone Sect disciples practice have close relations with the Bonebrutes’, and the bone spears I just collected contain faint death power. So we might as well tell people that Ji Kuang and the others have connections with Zhao Shanling.”

Nie Tian gradually start to understand her intention. “You mean?”

“I believe powerful experts from the Tool Sect are searching the entire Realm of Unbounded Desolation for Zhao Shanling right now,” Dong Li said with great certainty in her voice. “Even Zhao Shanling himself must know that it’s crucial that he doesn’t get discovered by people from the Tool Sect.

“So you just need to try your best to sense and locate searchers from the Tool Sect.

“Those who are sent to search for Zhao Shanling should be at the Profound realm at least. Once you find a Profound realm searcher from the Tool Sect, you can just tell him that people from the Bone Sect have connections with Zhao Shanling. We can use those bone spears as proof, and tell them that we heard Ji Kuang and the others talking about Zhao Shanling.

“Plus, that profound realm expert from the Bone Sect might know where Zhao Shanling is.”

Upon hearing these words, Nie Tian finally grasped Dong Li’s plan. His eyes lit up as he exclaimed, “You sure are full of tricks! If powerful experts from the Tool Sect are indeed searching for Zhao Shanling, us claiming that the Bone Sect has connections with Zhao Shanling might actually put the Bone Sect in trouble!”

“Believe me. That should be the case, more or less.” Dong Li was quite pleased after hearing Nie Tian’s compliments. She winked at him and said with a blossoming smile, “That said, now we’ll see if you can find a searcher from the Tool Sect within a short time.”

Feng Luo was still puzzled after hearing Nie Tian and Dong Li’s conversation.

He had no idea who Zhao Shanling was or what the Death Reign was, and thus couldn’t understand the thoughts behind Dong Li’s words.

However, Nie Tian had already started communicating with his nine Heaven Eyes, instructing them to fly as far as they could in an attempt to find a searcher from the Tool Sect.

Having a thoughtful mind, Dong Li’s speculations were completely in line with the current situation of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Meanwhile...

In a mountain valley that led to the Tool Sect, Qi Bailu and powerful experts from the Tool Sect all had grave expressions on their face.

The long and narrow valley was filled with slithering lightning bolts, torrential flames, walls of ice, screens of metal, and barriers of earth.

Numerous layers of defensive wards and a variety of powers filled every inch of the mountain valley, making it seem watertight.

Even still, the cluster of thick, pale-gray smoke was gradually moving deeper into the valley.

The defensive wards created by those formidable Qi warriors and their powerful spiritual tools were slowly being enveloped by the Death Reign, and rapidly running out of power.

The Death Reign exuded an aura of death that could wither all plants and extinguish all lives.

Even the advanced spiritual tools and all sorts of barriers seemed to be rapidly smothered of spirits after they were submerged in the pale-gray smoke. Many Spirit-channeling treasures detected the danger and fled in fear.

Despite Zhao Shanling not being there, not only was the Death Reign's might not compromised, but it was even able to display its terrifying might to the fullest.

As the Death Reign floated deeper into the valley, defensive wards rapidly dissipated one after another.

Qi Bailu stood among a dozen powerful experts from the Tool Sect, his expression grim and his eyes glittering with a hard light. "Still haven't found that traitor?"

The powerful experts around him struggled to control their respective spiritual tools. Sweat constantly rolled down their strained faces.

Meanwhile, the Death Reign continued to press forward.

“Sectmaster!” A person from the Tool Sect said with a soft voice. “We just learned that Elder Zhen is also searching for that traitor. She’s well-versed in the practice of spatial power. Perhaps she’ll be able to locate that traitor in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

“My junior martial sister’s attainments in the practice of spatial power are indeed at the peak-level in the Domain of the Falling Stars, but that traitor... isn’t worse than her.” After a moment of hesitation, Qi Bailu added, “Furthermore, the Realm of Unbounded Desolation covers such a vast territory. Even though she is extremely skilled at using spatial power, it will be very difficult to conduct a thorough search of the entire Realm of Unbounded Desolation within a short period of time.

“Inform the elders to keep looking for that traitor with everything within their power. Once they find any sign of him, report to me immediately!”

“Got it.”

...

The immense soul consciousness of a powerful late Profound realm Qi warrior from the Tool Sect spread out into his surroundings like an ocean. It went deep into the earth and the surrounding extinct volcanoes to conduct an inch-by-inch scan.

All of a sudden, something intruded into his soul perception range, which had filled the sky and covered the earth.

His attention was immediately caught by it.

A curious object that was invisible to the naked eye appeared in the distant night sky.

In a flash, he arrived in that area.

A puzzled look appeared in his eyes as he began to examine the Heaven Eye that had somehow floated to this area with his soul

power.

At that moment, a wisp of clear awareness came from within it, which said, “Please come with me, Senior. I heard people talking about the Death Reign and Zhao Shanling!”

Chapter 458: It Worked!

Eyes closed, Zhu Bin examined the Heaven Eye with his soul power.

A shudder ran through him as he received a clear message from this odd cluster of power fluctuations, which he could only detect with his soul power.

As one of the elders of the Tool Sect, he was at the late Profound realm, and was well-versed in the practice of thunder power.

Even though he was from the Tool Sect, he wasn't an equipment forger. He had first started by working as a guard for the Tool Sect's former sectmaster. Being favored by the former sectmaster, he eventually made it up to being one of the sect elders.

The scenes of the Death Reign ravaging the Realm of Unbounded Desolation and plunging its people into an abyss of misery years ago was still fresh in his memory.

It was because of Zhao Shanling and his Death Reign that the former sectmaster of the Tool Sect, who he had had great respect for, had died.

Now, many years later, Zhao Shanling and his Death Reign had returned to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

Hence, he had a strong desire to kill Zhao Shanling and avenge the former sectmaster.

However, he was also aware that the Death Reign was terrifyingly mighty, and that only by finding Zhao Shanling and making sure that he wasn't with the Death Reign would they be able to kill him.

He also knew that, just like Zhen Huilan, Zhao Shanling had also received true legacies from the former sectmaster, and thus was a master of spatial magics.

He had covered a vast amount of land and scanned heaven and earth with his profound soul consciousness, yet he still hadn't discovered any sign of Zhao Shanling, like many other elders from the Tool Sect who were now searching for Zhao Shanling in the Real of Unbounded Desolation.

Meanwhile, the Death Reign was gradually pressing through the mountain valley under Zhao Shanling's control. Once it passed through the valley, nothing would be able to stop it from going straight towards the Tool Sect.

Not only would many equipment forgers who had come to attend the assessment assembly die, but the Tool Sect's headquarters would also face rigorous attacks.

While he was at his wits' end, he discovered that curious cluster of power, from which he received a message regarding Zhao Shanling. Naturally, his spirit was lifted.

In the next moment, the cluster of power floated off in a certain direction.

Without any hesitation, Zhu Bin sped off after it, hoping to find out what was happening.

As he did, he continued to examine the odd cluster of psychic power and soul power mixed together.

"Qi warriors with cultivation bases lower than the Worldly realm won't have soul power at their disposal, only psychic power," Zhu Bin thought to himself. "Once a Qi warrior advances to the Worldly realm, his soul sea will go through great changes, and his psychic power will transform into soul power. Once they possess soul power, they wouldn't bother to form the less-advanced psychic power anymore. Such a cluster of mixed soul power and psychic power is quite new. Who does it belong to?"

With these thoughts in mind, Zhu Bin soon arrived at the location where Nie Tian and the others were, wreathed in

slithering lightning bolts. That was when he noticed that the cluster of power came to a stop by Nie Tian.

“Are you the one who spoke to me?” Tiny lightning bolts could be seen snaking in Zhu Bin’s eyes as he spoke, making him look stern and awestruck.

Just as Nie Tian was about to answer, Dong Li handed a few bone spears that used to belong to Ji Kuang to Zhu Bin, and said, “We just killed three members of the Bone Sect. These bone weapons they use contain faint death power. And the Death Reign is formed by rich and strong death power.”

Dong Li’s words successfully caught Zhu Bin’s attention. “Do I know you, kid?”

Dong Li, who wasn’t wearing a mask, possessed unmatched beauty. A mere glance at her would give any man a very deep impression.

“My name is Dong Li, and I’m from the Dong Clan in the Realm of a Hundred Battles,” Dong Li said respectfully. “Many years ago, I had the honor of making your acquaintance in the Tool Sect.”

“Oh, right... Dong Li.” After recognizing Dong Li, Zhu Bin’s stern expression grew softer as he asked, “Why are you here? And did you say that the Bone Sect has some sort of connection with Zhao Shanling?”

Dong Li nodded repeatedly and said with an urgent tone, “Three members of the Bone Sect attacked us, and we killed them. But before we were engaged in battle, we heard them talking about Zhao Shanling and the Death Reign. It appears that a middle Profound realm Bone Sect expert is currently in the Bone Sect’s ruins, and he seems to have connections with Zhao Shanling.”

Zhu Bin grabbed the bone spears. After a brief examination, he was convinced that they contained faint death power. His face therefore dropped.

Ji Kuang and Tao Pu's corpses were lying right beside them, and the white robes they were wearing made it clear that they disciples of the Bone Sect.

"The Bone Sect actually has a Profound realm expert again?!" Zhu Bin exclaimed with a grim expression. "I can't believe I didn't know that. After all, I've been living in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Years ago, the Death Reign basically wiped out the entire Bone Sect. Now their remaining disciples have sunken to becoming Zhao Shanling's lackeys. This cannot be pardoned!"

With these words, he glanced at Dong Li and the others, as well as Ji Kuang and Tao Pu's corpses, which were scattered on the ground. A puzzled expression appeared on his face.

Thanks to his Profound realm cultivation base, he had not only seen Ji Kuang and Tao Pu's corpses, but also detected Ping Yao's corpse, which was lying not far from this location.

Even though they were all dead now, he was able to perceive their cultivation bases before they had died.

As for Dong Li and the others, Feng Luo was the one with the highest cultivation base, which was the middle Greater Heaven stage, yet they had managed to kill Ji Kuang and the other two, which surprised Zhu Bin.

He turned to look at Nie Tian and asked, "That cluster of power belonged to you, right?"

Nie Tian nodded.

"Interesting," Zhu Bin said nodding. "You stay here and try not to go anywhere. I'll go check on the Bone Sect."

With these words, he morphed into a flash of lightning and disappeared into the distance.

Dong Li's tense expression eased up as she turned to Nie Tian and said with a smile, "Alright, whether the Bone Sect has connections with Zhao Shanling or not, he'll be in trouble for sure. That elder

of the Tool Sect will definitely interrogate that Profound realm expert from the Bone Sect about Zhao Shanling's whereabouts."

"Many thanks, Miss Dong," Feng Luo said sincerely, clasping his hands.

He had just learned from Dong Li and Zhu Bin's conversation that this unearthly, beautiful, young woman was actually from the Dong Clan in the Realm of a Hundred Battles. A sense of respect gradually rose in his heart.

The Dong Clan was a renowned and formidable Qi warrior force, not only in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, but also in the entire Domain of the Falling Stars.

The Dong Clan was currently overseen by their Soul realm expert patriarch, which made the whole Realm of Flame Heaven jealous.

After learning Dong Li's true identity, Yu Tong grew increasingly downcast and silent.

"How do you plan to thank me, Nie Tian?" Dong Li asked with a smile.

"Let's talk about that after Sectmaster Li is truly safe," Nie Tian answered.

"As long as she has managed to hang on to this point, she should be fine now."

...

In the Bone Sect's ruins.

Li Jing's Blood Lotus was floating high in the sky where Nie Tian and Dong Li had previously found the entrance to that magical dimension.

Sitting atop the Blood Lotus, Shen Xiu's face was as pale as a piece of paper. She unceasingly summoned her spiritual power and infused it into the Blood Lotus under her.

The Blood Lotus blossomed with dazzling, blood-colored light.

One blood-colored ribbon after another flew out of the shining Blood Lotus and dangled like the tentacles of a giant octopus.

Dressed in bloody red, Li Jing unleashed the Blood Sect's forbidden technique and turned the moon red and terrifying, as if she had smeared blood on it.

A gigantic blood shadow was roaring as it fought a Profound realm Qi warrior wreathed in fierce, golden light at close quarters.

Standing atop a mountain of bones that was hundreds of meter high, the Profound realm expert from the Bone Sect formed numerous, sky-filling, bone-shaped shadows with the Bone Sect's secret magic, clashing with the blood-colored ribbons unleashed by the Blood Lotus in midair.

Hovering in the air, Li Jing was wreathed in a rich, bloody aura, as if she were floating in the middle of a river of blood.

She unleashed all sorts of Blood Sect secret magics to strike the hundreds-of-meter-high mountain of bones, hoping to shatter it completely.

The mountain of bones fell apart upon the strong impacts, yet the scattered bones swirled up and regathered into a hundred-meter-tall Bone Giant.

The Bone Giant's whole body was intact, with the only exception being its eyes.

It swung a huge bone saber to sever the blood-colored ribbons which had flown out of the Blood Lotus one after another.

Every time a blood-colored ribbon was severed, Shen Xiu, who was sitting atop the Blood Lotus and wreathed in a misty bloody aura, would cough up a mouthful of blood.

Shen Xiu was only at the late Worldly realm. She was relying on the Blood Lotus to stay in the battle.

"It's time to give up," The Profound realm expert from the Bone

Sect said with a calm face, greed filling his gray pupils.

“I’ve already refined the Bonebrute’s corpse, which I promised you, into a spiritual tool. The reason I had people spread word was to attract you to come, so that you could further refine it with your sect’s Blood Demon refining method.

“After decades of research, I realized that your sect’s Blood Refining Incantation would work perfectly with our sect’s Bone Refining Incantation.

“Sectmaster Li, the only reason why I haven’t made a killing move yet is that I hope you can see reality.

“If you and I become companions, and the Bone Sect merges with the Blood Sect, it will benefit us both a great deal.

“I guarantee you that once our sects become one, our personal strength and cultivation bases will advance by leaps and bounds. The disciples under us will also be able to derive brand-new enlightenment from our integrated incantations.

“One day, our combined sect will join the ranks of the top Qi warrior sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars, just like the Heaven Palace Sect and Tool Sect!

“Your headquarters in the Realm of Flame Heaven will be where we establish our merged sect, the Blood Bone Sect. All of the other sects in the Realm of Flame Heaven will grovel before us and take orders from us!”

Chapter 459: Rescue

Under the blood moon, Li Jing's garments fluttered against the wind, her pupils scarlet.

The Bone Giant continued to sever the blood-colored ribbons that had flown out of the Blood Lotus one after another with an enormous bone saber.

Every time a ribbon was severed, the spiritual power within the Blood Lotus was slightly weakened.

She was doing her best to manipulate the huge blood shadow to keep Meng Qing, the Bone Sect's current leader, occupied. Hence, she didn't have the energy to strengthen the Blood Lotus.

It was her senior martial sister, Shen Xiu, who was controlling and powering that Blood Lotus. However, Shen Xiu was only at the late Worldly realm.

Considering the level of her spiritual power, it was already a miracle that she had lasted til this point.

Li Jing was well-aware that as those blood-colored ribbons were severed one after another, it wouldn't be very long before Shen Xiu would be drained of all her spiritual power and die.

Meng Qing, who was also at the Profound realm, was an expert in wielding the Bone Sect's various secret magics. Li Jing had even failed to affect the flow of his blood with the Blood Sect's Reverse Blood Flow technique.

Having fought for so long, she, who had to spare part of her own soul to control the enormous blood shadow, had consumed a significant amount of strength.

She knew that, if this went on, Shen Xiu would be the first to die, and then she probably wouldn't survive this tribulation herself either.

“I hope Feng Luo and Little Tong made it out of here alive.” After a moment of pondering, Li Jing made her decision.

She decided to risk suffering severe injuries and a cultivation setback to activate the Blood Lotus’s ultimate blood escape art and get away from this place with Shen Xiu.

Her scarlet, devilish pupils suddenly began to shine with dazzling light as they were rapidly filled with a rich bloody aura.

The river of bloody aura around her started to quietly float towards the Blood Lotus, along with the enormous roaring blood shadow.

Meng Qing, who had been secretly observing her, shrewdly discovered the abnormal movements of the river of bloody aura and the enormous blood shadow.

Calm and composed, he sneered and said, “Sectmaster Li, do you know why I picked my sect’s headquarters to be the place where we finished the transaction?”

Before Li Jing could answer, he went on and said, “Many years ago, my entire sect was annihilated overnight.”

With these words, Meng Qing’s expression grew grave, and the corner of his mouth twitched briefly. “Everyone in the headquarters died. Not a single person survived. Fortunately, I was not in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation at that time, and thus survived that calamity. Even after many years, I still didn’t dare to come back, but rather roamed other realms like a stray dog.

“The overnight annihilation of my sect was the doing of a legendary villain from the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. He was the most skilled spatial power wielder throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars.

“And the terrifying spiritual tool he used to wipe my sect out carried unfathomable mysteries of spatial power. It was that spiritual tool that made these normal-looking ruins full of hidden

danger.”

Upon hearing these words, Li Jing, who was about to activate the blood escape art, frowned in surprise.

“If you don’t believe me, you can go ahead and have a try.” Meng Qing was still calm and composed. “Once someone who’s not very skilled at using spatial magics casts a forbidden spatial magic, the consequences... will be hard to predict.”

With an expression of anticipation, he even encouraged Li Jing, “In fact, I kind of want to see what will happen to those who dare to use spatial magic in the Bone Sect. It’s just that I don’t have the audacity to try it myself. I’d be happy to be an observer if Sectmaster Li is willing to do the honor.”

After hearing these words, not only was Li Jing not enthused, but she actually became afraid to enact her plan.

While Li Jing was torn with indecision, Meng Qing’s face turned warm. “Sectmaster Li, your sect’s and my sect’s incantations complement each other. Our union will benefit us both. Why do you refuse to open your eyes to reality?

“Imagine this. One day, our Blood Bone Sect will rise to prominence and become as powerful as the Heaven Palace Sect and the Tool Sect. Won’t that be better than you struggling to keep the Blood Sect afloat in the Realm of Flame Heaven?”

Glaring at him, Li Jing said, “You disgust me!”

Meng Qing was suddenly enraged.

Just as he was about to launch a murderous attack on her and Shen Xiu and snatch the Blood Sect’s incantations by force, he was struck by an intense sense of crisis.

He spun around.

A thick lightning bolt flew over from the distant sky. After it came to a stop in midair in front of Meng Qing, it turned out to be

Zhu Bin.

“Elder Zhu?” Startled, Meng Qing hastily bowed respectfully. “I’m the son of Meng Han, the Bone Sect’s former sectmaster. I happened to be out of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation when our sect was annihilated. To what do we owe Elder Zhu’s presence?”

Zhu Bin went blank for a moment before saying, “Meng Qing? I’ve heard of you. I thought you were killed by the Death Reign like your father. I can’t believe you possess such amazing talent and managed to advance to the middle Profound realm through practicing your sect’s incantations at such an age. From the look of it, your cultivation talent is far superior to your father’s.”

Meng Qing behaved incredibly modestly when facing Zhu Bin. “That’s very kind of you.”

Zhu Bing let out a cold harrumph. “It’s a pity that you’ve associated yourself with evil! Your sect was wiped out overnight by Zhao Shanling’s Death Reign. Everyone in your sect died because of the Death Reign, including your father. Zhao Shanling should have been your sworn enemy, yet you sold yourself to him. How can you expect your father to find peace in the Yellow Springs?!”

A confused expression spread across Meng Qing’s face. “Where is this coming from, Elder Zhu?”

Zhu Bin grew impatient and said loudly, “Don’t you try to fool me! Where is Zhao Shanling at this moment?”

“How would I know about that?” Meng Qing felt deeply wronged.

WHOOSH!

All of a sudden, a spot in the dark sky not far from the Bone Sect’s ruins began to shine brightly, like a door slowly opening into darkness.

Immediately afterwards, Zhen Huilan stepped through it with a

black-robed, burly man that looked like a mountain.

“The Bone Sect’s ruins are right ahead of us.” With these words, Zhen Huilan, who had forcibly opened a spatial portal and created a spatial tunnel out of thin air, got ahold of her bearings and sped off towards the Bone Sect’s dilapidated headquarters.

She had received word from Zhu Bin while he had been searching on the other side of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. The urgency of the matter had led her to come with the help of her spatial device, along with that burly expert.

As she and the large black-robed man flashed into appearance before Meng Qing and Zhu Bin, Zhu Bin, who had been berating Meng Qing, hastily turned around and bowed, saying, “I didn’t expect that you would come as well.”

Li Jing, who had been forgotten since Zhu Bin’s arrival, was shocked as soon as she saw Zhen Huilan and the black-robed man with her.

As the sectmaster of the Blood Sect, this wasn’t the first time she had been to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, so she naturally had some knowledge regarding the main figures in the Tool Sect.

Even though she hadn’t met Zhen Huilan in person before, she had seen portraits of her. Therefore, she instantly recognized her.

As for the burly, mountain-like man beside her, the moment he arrived, Li Jing’s eyelids started twitching with an intense sense of crisis. “A Soul realm expert!”

Just like her, the Profound realm expert who Meng Qing had invited to help him was also deeply shocked and awed.

He, who practiced metal power, was so petrified by the black-robed man that he immediately disassociated himself from Meng Qing by saying, “I have absolutely no connections with the Bone Sect, Mr. Wu! I only agreed to come and help him deal with this woman from the Blood Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven because

he paid handsomely for my service.”

The burly black-robed man took a glance at him, but didn't say a word.

“Umm... I have nothing to do with what Meng Qing has done or plans to do!” The man urgently attempted to make his relationship with Meng Qing clear. “If you don't have any other business with me, could I please be excused?”

“No,” The black-robed expert said with an expressionless face.

The man hung his head, his face ghastly, as if he had been determined guilty by the burly expert, and was waiting for his penalty.

In fear and trepidation, Meng Qing hastily said to the black-robed man, “Mr. Wu, I really have nothing to do with Zhao Shanling. This is the first time I've returned to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation in decades!”

A meaningful look appeared in the black-robed man's eyes. “Well, what a coincidence. This is also the first time that traitor has returned to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation after he disappeared decades ago.”

Upon hearing these words, desperation filled Meng Qing's face.

“Mr. Wu, Zhao Shanling's whereabouts are vital to our efforts to put an end to the turbulent situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.” After a moment of pondering, Zhu Bin suggested, “It seems that the rest of us can't tell if Meng Qing is telling the truth or not, so will you please take the trouble to use your soul transmission art on him?”

The black-robed man nodded briefly. “That's exactly what I was thinking.”

“NO!” Meng Qing's face turned pale with fright. Too scared to mind Li Jing and Shen Xiu, he fled into the distance at the fastest speed possible.

“I’ll be back soon.” With these words, the burly, mountain-like man vanished into thin air.

Moments later, Meng Qing’s blood-curdling scream rang out from the direction he had fled in.

Upon hearing his miserable scream, both Zhu Bin and Zhen Huilan’s faces remained expressionless, as if they had expected it.

However, everyone else gasped with terror, especially the Profound realm expert who had come upon Meng Qing’s invitation. His face was already covered in sweat.

Chapter 460: Giving Nie Tian Face

Meng Qing's scream made even Li Jing's hair stand on end.

Since she knew the black-robed man's identity, she knew that Meng Qing must have suffered great injuries, even if he survived.

Therefore, she turned to Zhu Bin and Zhen Huilan and said, "We are from the Blood Sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven. Meng Qing tricked us into coming to this place. He said he had a Bonebrute's corpse to sell to us, but who would have thought that he had other plans."

Zhen Huilan's expression flickered as she asked instantly, "The Blood sect in the Realm of Flame Heaven? I heard that earlier, when Nie Tian returned to the Realm of Flame Heaven, he went straight to your sect, instead of the Cloudsoaring Sect. Is that right?"

A puzzled expression spread across Li Jing's face. Even though she didn't know why Zhen Huilan would ask such a question, she answered with the truth, "Yeah. Nie Tian has saved our sect more than once, and it was him who somehow managed to awaken the Bone Blood Demon in our sect."

"I see." Zhen Huilan nodded gently, as if she grasped Nie Tian's relationship with the Blood Sect. Immediately afterwards, she waved her hand and said, "You may leave now."

Both Li Jing and Shen Xiu went blank upon hearing these words.

Zhu Bin even kindly pointed out the direction for them, saying, "Two members of your sect are not far in that direction. It was them who referred me to this place."

"Feng Luo and Little Tong are still alive!" Shen Xiu exclaimed, overjoyed.

"You may go find them now. I believe what we're doing here doesn't concern you anymore." Zhen Huilan smiled heartily and

added, “If Nie Tian ever goes back to the Blood Sect, please tell him that Mr. Hua is worried about him, and that he should try to get in contact with him. He’ll probably know how to find Mr. Hua.”

“Okay, I will,” Li Jing promised, though she didn’t understand the reason behind it.

She had thought she was doomed during this trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Never had she imagined that not only did she and Shen Xiu survive this tribulation, but Feng Luo and Yu Tong also turned out to be fine.

Just as she and Shen Xiu jumped onto her Blood Lotus and were about to leave, Zhen Huilan’s eyebrows rose, looking at the hundreds-of-meters-tall Bone Giant which was standing witlessly to the side.

Meng Qing had fled so urgently that he had even forgotten about his Bone Giant.

Without its master’s soul commands, the Bone Giant had long since stopped attacking the Blood Lotus, but rather stood in place, holding its huge bone saber.

“Wait!” Zhen Huilan called out.

Puzzled, Li Jing turned to look at her from atop the Blood Lotus. “What’s up?”

“You said that Nie Tian awakened your sect’s Bone Blood Demon, right?” Zhen Huilan asked.

Li Jing smiled bitterly and said, “Yes, he did. He awakened that Bone Blood Demon. But immediately after he left, it fell dormant again. I promised him that that Bone Blood Demon belongs to him now. He’ll be free to take him whenever he wants.”

Zhen Huilan dragged her words as she said, nodding, “So that’s how it is. Take this Bone Giant with you. Consider it compensation for your sect’s loss.”

As she uttered these words, one streak of flames after another flew out from her fingertips, formed some sort of magical fiery pattern in the air, and finally infused into the enormous Bone Giant.

The imprints Meng Qing had left in each and every bone that formed the Bone Giant were rapidly erased.

Dozens of seconds later, Li Jing was no longer able to detect the slightest bit of Meng Qing's aura from the Bone Giant.

That was when she realized that the connection between Meng Qing and the Bone Giant had been completely eradicated.

As the third disciple of the Tool Sect's former sectmaster, Zhen Huilan was one of the best equipment forgers throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars.

Therefore, the fact that she was able to erase the soul imprints Meng Qing had left in the Bone Giant effortlessly didn't surprise her at all.

What surprised her was that she wasn't friends with or related to Zhen Huilan. She had never even seen her in person before. However, not only did she allow her and Shen Xiu to leave without questioning them, but she even erased Meng Qing's imprints in the Bone Giant and let her take it with her.

It was such a big surprise that it bewildered her, not knowing why Zhen Huilan would do this.

"Nie Tian is also a junior of mine," Zhen Huilan explained smiling. "He's good friends with my two disciples."

A smile appeared on Shen Xiu's puzzled face. "So this is all because of Nie Tian!"

As an elder of the Blood Sect, she had once had a poor opinion of Nie Tian because of his personal feud with Yu Tong.

Even later, after he had awakened the Bone Blood Demon and

saved the Blood Sect from the outsiders, she had still harbored ill feelings about him.

Originally, she had been responsible for that Bone Blood Demon, so she had been rather upset when Nie Tian had awakened it and brought it under his command.

Afterwards, Li Jing had favored Nie Tian both overtly and covertly. Li Jing had even jeopardized the Blood Sect's relationship with the Spiritual Treasure Sect by taking the An sisters in after Nie Tian had disappeared from the Realm of Flame Heaven, which had made her feel that Li Jing had attached too much importance to Nie Tian.

Only at this point, after seeing Zhen Huilan's surprisingly friendly attitude towards them when they were trapped in a foreign realm, did she finally realize what a wise decision her junior martial sister had made.

As Shen Xiu's furrowed eyebrows straightened, her negative opinions about Nie Tian dissolved. "So all of this... she has done to give Nie Tian face."

"Many thanks!" Li Jing said, overjoyed. With a swing of her arm, streaks of bloody aura shot out, wreathed the Bone Giant, and started pulling it towards her ring of holding.

"The Realm of Unbounded Desolation is seeing a perilous time," Zhen Huilan reminded them. "Travel safe, and don't return to Desolate City for a while."

Li Jing and Shen Xiu nodded and flew away on the Blood Lotus under her and Zhu Bin's gazes.

As they flew away from the Bone Sect's ruins, mixed emotions rose in Shen Xiu's heart. "I can't believe Nie Tian has such a big influence! Junior martial sister, I just realized how wise your decision was to favor Nie Tian so much back in the day. And how petty I was for being upset about losing that Bone Blood Demon to

him.”

Sitting atop the Blood Lotus, Li Jing took out and swallowed a handful of Blood Pills. With an entranced look in her eyes, she said, “Truth be told, I had never imagined that he would have obtained two fragmentary star marks during the Heaven Gate trial. From the look of it, he didn’t squander his time during the few years he was gone. He seems to have made friends with some of the best equipment forgers.”

With a smile, Shen Xiu said, “If it weren’t for that, we might not have been able to pull through this tribulation and obtain that Bone Giant so easily. Now that Little Tong and Feng Luo are also alive, it seems that, even though the process has been tough, the result has turned out to be satisfying.”

Li Jing, who had always been cold and graceful, nodded gently as a hearty smile appeared on her face. “We got this Bone Giant without spending a single spirit stone. And Meng Qing has already refined it with the Bone Sect’s secret magics. This trip sure has been productive.”

As the two of them spoke, the Blood Lotus traveled through the air at an alarming speed. It wasn’t long before it came to the location where Feng Luo, Yu Tong, and the others were.

“Master!” Yu Tong exclaimed, looking up into the sky.

Feng Luo was also overjoyed as he saw them. “Sectmaster and Elder Shen have successfully escaped!”

With a bright smile, Dong Li turned to Nie Tian and said, “Well?”

Seeing that the Blood Lotus was gradually approaching with Li Jing and Shen Xiu on it, Nie Tian let out a sigh of relief. He clasped his hands towards Dong Li and said, “You’re truly amazing, Sister Dong. I’ll be true to my words. Whatever you want me to do, I shall go all-out to deliver.”

“Now that’s the way to talk,” Dong Li said, her charming face

splitting into a hearty smile.

WHOOSH!

As the Blood Lotus landed, Li Jing examined Nie Tian and Dong Li, who looked unfamiliar, and asked Feng Luo with a confused expression on her face, “These are?”

Pointing at Dong Li, Feng Luo said, “This is the daughter of the clanmaster of the Dong Clan from the Realm of a Hundred Battles.”

Immediately afterwards, he turned to look at Nie Tian and said, “Guess who this is, sectmaster.”

Li Jing was deeply confused.

At that moment, Nie Tian bowed towards her and said, “Greetings, Senior Li.”

“Nie Tian!” A shudder ran through Li Jing’s body, as the moment Nie Tian opened his mouth, she knew it was him. “How come you’re here?”

Feng Luo’s expression grew serious as he explained, “All of this is thanks to Nie Tian and Miss Dong. If it weren’t for them, Little Tong and I would have been killed by Ji Kuang and his friends. Without Miss Dong’s brilliant idea, I’m afraid you and Elder Shen probably would have...” He went on and explained everything in detail.

After hearing his description, both Li Jing and Shen Xiu’s eyes grew wide in shock, realizing that it hadn’t been a coincidence that Zhu Bin from the Tool Sect had appeared in the Bone Sect earlier.

After a moment of silence, Li Jing turned to Dong Li and said, “Thank you for helping us, Miss Dong.”

With a wave of her hand, Dong Li said, “You’re welcome. I did all that for Nie Tian.”

Afterwards, she asked, “Did Zhu Bin scare the attackers off?”

Li Jing shook her head. “Not him alone. Master Zhen and Mr. Wu also rushed over there.” She went on and briefly explained what had happened in the Bone Sect.

After she was finished, she gazed at Nie Tian and said with a confused expression, “Apparently, Master Zhen did all that to give you face. How did you make her acquaintance?”

Nie Tian seemed bewildered.

Dong Li shot him a contemptuous look and said, “You fool! Master Zhen is Li Ye and Pei Qiqi’s master, Zhen Huilan!”

Nie Tian was instantly enlightened.

Chapter 461: Wu Langxie

BOOM!

Meng Qing was thrown to the ground and collapsed. It had only been a few minutes since he had fled, yet he looked like he was now suffering from a fatal disease.

Under Zhen Huilan and Zhu Bin's longing gazes, Wu Langxie, who was floating in midair, slowly shook his head and said, "I ran through his memories of the past year with my soul transmitting technique, but I didn't find any connection between him and Zhao Shanling."

Eyebrows furrowed, Zhu Bin sighed and said, "Then it seems that he was telling the truth... But the situation over on the sectmaster's front doesn't look good. If we can't find Zhao Shanling soon, I'm afraid..."

The burly, mountain-like Wu Langxie gazed off towards the cluster of volcanoes where powerful experts from the Flame God Sect were bustling, and said in a low voice, "If there's no other way, I'll go and challenge the Flame God, Xia Yi."

"Don't!" Zhu Bin said hastily. "I know you're very powerful, Mr. Wu. However, you're only at the early Soul realm, which is inferior to Xia Yi's cultivation base. I believe that you would have a fair chance at beating him if you were at the same cultivation level as him. But the thing is... you're not."

Zhen Huilan chimed in by saying, "He's right. Only when my eldest martial brother has finished with the Death Reign will he be able to go over there and deal with Xia Yi. Langxie, you're not far from entering the middle Soul realm. If you insist on fighting Xia Yi now, you'll probably suffer heavy injuries and a setback in your cultivation. You'd better wait till you enter the middle Soul realm to fight him."

Wu Langxie frowned. "If we sit back and let Xia Yi collect the earthflame essence he needs, he might soon make another breakthrough and enter the late Soul realm. Once he does, perhaps no one in the Domain of the Falling Stars will be able to contend against him. Even though the patriarch of the Heaven Palace Sect is also at the late Soul realm, their current sectmaster Zhao Luofeng..."

With these words, he grew silent.

As soon as the Heaven Palace Sect's sectmaster was mentioned, both Zhu Bin and Zhen Huilan frowned deeply.

After a moment of pondering, Zhen Huilan turned to look at the weak Meng Qing and his Profound realm friend, who was as silent as a cicada in cold weather. With a wave of her hand, she said, "Nothing here concerns you anymore. You can go now."

After being carried back to this location, Meng Qing had discovered that his Bone Giant was gone, along with Li Jing and Shen Xiu, which frustrated him greatly.

However, he hadn't dared to say a word, but rather hung his head silently.

At this moment, upon hearing Zhen Huilan's words, he felt as if he were pardoned from a death sentence, and thus planned to leave this place of trouble as quickly as possible.

"Don't you try to mess with the Blood Sect again." Zhen Huilan said with a cold snort. "Otherwise, I won't let you off as easily."

The Profound realm cultivator who practiced metal power hastily said, "We'll leave the Realm of Unbounded Desolation as quickly as possible."

Bitterness filled Meng Qing's face as he said, "We wouldn't be able to even if we wanted to."

Having lost his Bone Giant and having had his soul badly injured by Wu Langxie with his soul transmitting technique, his battle

prowess had dropped to only forty percent of his peak state.

If he were to encounter Li Jing in such a poor condition, he would turn around and leave without any hesitation. It seemed that Zhen Huilan also knew that Meng Qing would no longer be a threat to Li Jing. Hence, she ordered impatiently, “Get as far away from here as possible.”

Hearing these words, Meng Qing and the other man nodded and hastily fled in the opposite direction that Li Jing had left in.

After they were gone, Zhu Bin resumed their previous topic by saying, “I sent word to the Heaven Palace Sect soon after Zhao Shanling appeared. Zhao Luofeng only replied with one sentence.”

“What did he say?” Zhen Huilan asked.

Zhu Bin smiled bitterly. “He said, ‘Are you really considering killing my little brother?’ Back when Zhao Shanling brought misery and suffering to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation many years ago, all Zhao Luofeng did was stay out of it. After all, Zhao Shanling is his younger brother. It’s not realistic to expect the Heaven Palace Sect to help us.”

“From the look of it, finding that traitor is the only way,” Zhen Huilan said with a sigh.

“It seems that we’ve come to a dead end here. I’ll go search in other regions.” With these words, Zhu Bin sped away through the air, frustration filling his face.

“I’ll set off too,” Wu Langxie said.

Zhen Huilan nodded gently, but just as he was about to fly away, she said, “Wait, Langxie...”

Wu Langxie turn his head back. “What?”

Even though Zhen Huilan looked somewhat embarrassed, she decided to speak her mind after a brief hesitation. “I know little Wu Ling lost his left hand because of Nie Tian during the Heaven

Gate trial. But Nie Tian is one of my juniors, so I hope you can go easy on him if you run into him in the future.”

After a moment of silence, Wu Langxie said with a serious face, “I’ll let the juniors settle their feuds themselves. Let me put it this way: even if you weren’t related to Nie Tian, I wouldn’t lower myself to kill a junior. My theory of education is to let them solve their own problems, like I did when I was growing up. I’ll never allow them to develop the habit of depending on their seniors.”

“Sorry, Langxie. I shouldn’t have underestimated your integrity.” Zhen Huilan expressed her apologies.

She knew Wu Langxie very well, and had heard about how he had raised and taught Wu Ling, but she simply wanted a straightforward answer from him to make sure.

“It’s okay,” Wu Langxie said with a unconstrained laugh. “On the other hand, even though that Nie Tian kid has so fortunately obtained the legacies of the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace, he may not necessarily be able to beat Wu Ling every time. If Wu Ling were to run into him some day and kill him in fair combat, I hope you can find peace with that as well.”

With these words, he sped away like a bolt of lightning.

Smiling bitterly, Zhen Huilan muttered, “I hope they don’t ever meet again.”

She could sense that, even though Wu Langxie was too proud and just to kill a junior himself, he still held a grudge towards Nie Tian.

After all, Wu Ling had severed his hand because of Nie Tian.

This explained why he had kept Wu Ling by his side and taught him himself ever since Wu Ling had returned from the Heaven Gate trial.

After Zhu Bin and Wu Langxie both left, she cast those distracting thoughts out of her mind and started searching for Zhao Shanling’s aura with her secret magic in the Bone Sect’s

ruins.

...

Meanwhile...

Nie Tian learned that the Master Zhen Li Jing referred to was none other than Li Ye and Pei Qiqi's master, and realized why Li Jing and Shen Xiu were able to extricate themselves from their difficult situation.

Without giving Nie Tian, Li Jing, and the others the time to catch up, Dong Li urged everyone somewhat anxiously, "We'd better get away from here as soon as possible. Nie Tian, you can't expose your true identity. Otherwise, it will cause us lots of trouble."

"Why?" Nie Tian asked. "Now that Senior Zhen is right ahead of us in the Bone Sect's ruins, I figured I might pay her a visit."

"You can't do that!" Dong Li blurted in shock. "Do you know who that Mr. Wu is, the one Sectmaster Li talked about?"

Intrigued, Nie Tian asked, "No, who is he?"

"That's Wu Ling's father!" Dong Li exclaimed while having a headache over Nie Tian's ignorance. "Wu Ling is the son of Wu Langxie and an elder of the Tool Sect, Bai Yu. Wu Langxie is a famous formidable figure in the Domain of the Falling Stars. He started as an independent cultivator, but he advanced surprisingly rapidly in his cultivation through practicing devotedly and killing countless opponents. Therefore, almost every sect wanted to take him in.

"Eventually, he married Bai Yu, a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger from the Tool Sect, thus coming into a deep relationship with the Tool Sect. He can be considered as half a Tool Sect disciple now.

"He has more than once killed opponents with higher cultivation bases when he was young. Now that he has entered the early Soul realm and received the Tool Sect's full support, people believe he

has a good chance of becoming the most powerful man in the Domain of the Falling Stars in the future.”

Even though Li Jing didn't know the history between Nie Tian and Wu Ling, she was well-aware of what kind of person Wu Langxie was, and therefore added, “Rumors about that man are known to people everywhere in the Domain of the Falling Stars. He has long since possessed all that he needs to establish his own sect, but he seems to think that's not worth doing.

“That person is far beyond ordinary, and not one to mess with.”

Nie Tian was deeply shocked after hearing Dong Li and Li Jing's description, finally realizing what kind of formidable background Wu Ling possessed.

Without hearing what Nie Tian had to say, Li Jing parked her Blood Lotus at the center of the crowd and urged everyone to get on board. “Alright, let's get out of here.”

Dong Li dragged Nie Tian with her as they jumped onto the Blood Lotus together. At the same time, she said in a low voice, “Sure, Wu Langxie is a scary person, but I don't think you're anything less. The way I see it, if you step into the Soul realm one day, it'll be hard to say who will triumph in a fair fight, you or him.”

Off to the side, Li Jing nodded in approval and chimed in, “That day will come. I don't think anyone at the same cultivation stage as you can beat you in combat, Nie Tian.”

Feng Luo, Shen Xiu, and even Yu Tong nodded quietly, agreeing with Li Jing.

Under their approving gazes, Nie Tian smiled brightly and said, “I hope that day comes soon.”

Chapter 462: A Major Tribulation for the Tool Sect

At the end of a mountain valley.

A cluster of thick, pale-gray smoke was slowly penetrating and dissolving a ward of slithering lightning bolts formed by multiple Tool Sect elders.

A number of thunderballs were floating in midair, flickering and giving rise to heaven-shaking, earth-shattering rumbles from time to time.

Beast-like shadows could be vaguely seen within those thunderballs. They were apparently struggling and trying to break away from the thunderballs as the Death Reign closed in on them.

“We can’t hold much longer, sectmaster,” An elder with dangling, long, white eyebrows, who resembled Zhu Bin, said with a suffering expression. “It’ll take the Death Reign a quarter hour at the most to breach our last defensive ward.”

The elder was named Zhu Lian, Zhu Bin’s cousin and a late Profound realm cultivator.

Eyebrows furrowed, Qi Bailu gazed at the slowly approaching Death Reign. With a helpless sigh, he ordered, “Inform all supervising disciples to urge the equipment forgers who are attending the assessment assembly to stop and return to Desolate City. Tell them not to stay in Desolate City, and that they need to evacuate via the inter-realm teleportation portal as soon as possible.”

Standing next to him, an elder who was responsible for giving out orders answered with a grim expression, “Got it, sectmaster.” Then, he took out a Sound Stone and whispered Qi Bailu’s order into it.

Afterwards, Qi Bailu asked the elders around him, “Have Zhu Bin

and my junior martial sister found that traitor yet?”

“Not yet.”

Qi Bailu nodded as he summoned Zhu Lian to his side and said, “Here’s what we’ll do: you’ll take everyone here back to our sect’s headquarters. Once you’re back, activate the grand protective spell formation. I’ll stall the Death Reign for you.”

WHOOSH!

With these words, an object flew out from within his cuff.

It was a bronze mirror with a smooth surface, within which torrential flames could be seen, as if it was sealing a mysterious fiery dimension.

The treasure was named the Flame Mirror, a seventh level Spirit Channeling grade treasure. Even in the entire Domain of the Falling Stars, it was considered one of the most prestigious spiritual tools in existence.

After whooshing out of Qi Bailu’s cuff, the palm-sized bronze mirror rapidly expanded and filled the entire mountain valley within seconds.

Endless flames poured out from within it, aggravating the fluctuations of spatial energy in the valley.

It was as if the Flame Mirror was serving as a medium that connected the mountain valley with a dimension of infinite flames.

Soon, not only the mountain valley, but also the adjacent areas were engulfed by the raging flames that poured out of the Flame Mirror.

Standing at the end of the valley, powerful experts from the Tool Sect looked at the Flame Mirror and the endless flames before them, feeling as if they were looking at a completely different world.

Qi Bailu’s figure faded, as if he had turned into a faint shadow

which could vanish at any moment. “Go, Zhu Lian! Take all of our sect members back to our headquarters! No one is allowed to come out before I return!” With these words, he vanished completely into thin air.

Simultaneously, his vague figure appeared in the middle of the torrential flames within the gigantic Flame Mirror.

He continued to summon endless flames from that mysterious dimension and rapidly turned into an enormous man of flames, as if he had become the imperial lord of that mysterious dimension and the infinite flames within it.

As the cluster of thick smoke formed by the Death Reign continued to press forward, Zhao Shanling’s voice rang out from the depths of it. “My beloved senior martial brother, you’ve finally summoned your Flame Mirror. I can’t wait to see if your Flame Mirror is able to stop my Death Reign!”

The might of the Death Reign seemed to suddenly surge, causing the thunderballs before it to instantly become dim and lifeless.

“Why are you still here?!” Qi Bailu shouted.

Zhu Lian made a grasping motion in the air, and the thunderballs flew back to him. With reddened eyes, he looked at Qi Bailu and said, “Take care, sectmaster! We’ll be waiting for you in our headquarters!”

“Let’s go!” He took the initiative to fly towards the Tool Sect.

The other Profound realm experts from the Tool Sect also leaped into the sky and sped away after him, bearing their grief.

“Zhao Shanling, don’t you imagine that you’ll be able to do whatever you want by hiding in the dark and controlling your Death Reign!” Qi Bailu’s voice echoed out from within the enormous Flame Mirror. “Master’s biggest mistake was expelling you into the boundless void, instead of killing you. The reason why master made that mistake was that he treated you as his child and

couldn't bear to kill you. But I won't make the mistake he made!"

Zhao Shanling laughed unceasingly like a madman. "What you have now should have belonged to me, senior martial brother. Of the three of us, you were the least talented. The spiritual tool you forged back then was the weakest. I should have been the winner of the contest!

"What did I do wrong by exterminating those puny sects and unifying the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?

"Even though those old bastards in our sect knew the Tool Sect benefited from what I did, they paraded their pretended benevolence and righteousness in front of everyone, and even used my deed as an excuse to punish me!

"I've returned this time to take back what should have been mine! Whoever dares to question me again shall die!"

WHOOSH!

The cluster of thick pale-gray smoke created by the Death Reign finally came into contact with the raging flames unleashed by the Flame Mirror.

...

At midday, the sun was high and fierce.

Li Jing's Blood Lotus took Nie Tian and the others to a silent mountain valley surrounded by extinct volcanoes.

After tens of thousands of years, the earthflame essence within them had long since run out.

After landing, Li Jing had a brief conversation with Nie Tian, telling him that Zhen Huilan had asked her to pass word to him that she wanted Nie Tian to contact Hua Mu.

Nie Tian was aware that, since Hua Mu was a senior member of the Spirit Condor, he would be able to get in contact with Hua Mu as long as he returned to Shatter City in the Realm of Split Void

and found Hu Rong, who was also a member of the Spirit Condor.

It was just that the inter-spatial teleportation portal was located in Desolate City, and that was where Zhao Shanling's Death Reign was heading. Hence, he couldn't go there for a while.

Furthermore, considering the turmoil that was hitting the Realm of Boundless Desolation, it wouldn't be safe to travel around at this moment.

Therefore, Nie Tian and the others decided to stay in this silent mountain valley until the situation stabilized.

Under the scorching sun, Nie Tian practiced cultivation in the lotus position while Dong Li sat not far from him, lolling against a large rock.

"It seems that the Realm of Unbounded Desolation isn't as hot as when we first came here." Nie Tian said with furrowed eyebrows as he refined his vortex of flame power with Flame Crystals. "Neither Desolate City, the Bonebrutes' former headquarters, nor the Bone Sect's ruins were in the middle of active volcanoes, yet I felt unbearably hot in those places."

"But since we returned from... you know where, I don't feel as hot as I did before."

Holding a odd-looking, black spirit stone, Dong Li's bright eyes moved about as she pondered. A moment later, she said, "I bet it's because those people from the Flame God Sect have taken significant amounts of earthflame essence away from the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, which is causing the atmosphere to change."

Intrigued, Nie Tian asked, "The deprivation of earthflame essence can cause such a tremendous change?"

"Yeah." Dong Li nodded. "But that doesn't concern us. We don't planning on staying in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation long-term anyways. Also, there's no need to worry about the loss of

earthflame essence here. As far as I know, the Tool Sect has their way of channeling flame power from other dimensions to replenish the deficient flame power in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.”

“The Tool Sect can actually do that?” A shocked expression appeared on Nie Tian’s face.

“It’s said that the Tool Sect’s grand protective spell formation connects a few small, fiery dimensions. Even Qi Bailu’s Flame Mirror has a similar function, which allows him to summon raging flame power from other dimensions to attack his enemies.” Dong Li chuckled. “You should know that many of the spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range in the Realm of Split Void which lead to fiery dimensions were purchased by the Tool Sect at high prices.”

“Most of them aren’t fit for creatures to live in, but contain considerable amounts of flame power.”

“In order to make use of said flame power, the Tool Sect established inter-spatial connections with those fiery dimensions using their grand spell formation and the Flame Mirror.”

“The Tool Sect is the only sect that can do that. As formidable as Xia Yi is, he’s only one man.”

“After all, the Flame God Sect’s strength isn’t as deeply-rooted as the Tool Sect’s. If, like the Tool Sect, the Flame God Sect had also accumulated a number of fiery dimensions over thousands of years, Xia Yi wouldn’t have come all the way to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to collect earthflame essence to prepare for his next breakthrough in cultivation.”

Nie Tian was carried away as he marveled subconsciously, “The Tool Sect’s strength is indeed astonishingly profound.”

As he was absorbed in his thoughts, his eyebrows suddenly flickered as he sensed that the green aura in his heart had suddenly

grown restless again.

“Another bloodline transcendence!”

Chapter 463: Life Drain

Nie Tian immediately stopped absorbing flame power from the Flame Crystals in his hand and talking to Dong Li.

Instead, he closed his eyes to examine the green aura with his mind.

This wasn't the first time the green aura had behaved this way.

In fact, the green aura, which carried the profound truths of life, had already transcended two times before, giving Nie Tian the Life Transfer and the Life Stealth bloodline talents.

However, both those times, the green aura had gone through long dormant periods before exploding with a new bloodline talent.

As for this time, Nie Tian had expected that the green aura would need a long time to digest the copious amount of life power it had absorbed from a Fruit of Life in the magical dimension.

He could still vividly remember the green aura lying dormant for a very long time after accumulating enough flesh power. Only then did the transcendence finally happen.

But perhaps because the life power the green aura had absorbed from the Fruit of Life this time was incomparably rich, the digestion process turned out to be unprecedentedly smooth and short. Therefore, the transcendence was achieved earlier this time.

“The transcendence of my bloodline will mean the awakening of a new bloodline talent!”

After a wisp of his psychic awareness swam to his heart and saw that the crystal-like chains within the green aura were emanating dazzling light, Nie Tian was convinced that his speculation was correct.

An ancient and mysterious aura of life suddenly burst forth from

within the green aura, which was now glittering with dazzling, green light.

New crystal-like chains that were as fine as hairs seemed to be born under the inducing effect of the explosive aura of life.

As soon as new crystal-like chains came to form, they mangled with the old ones, aligning into profound, ever-changing formations.

As that happened, the strong aura of life that burst forth from within the green aura suddenly seemed to spread to the nine Heaven Eyes Nie Tian had scattered in the vicinity. An even more profound connection was established between them and the green aura in his heart.

Immediately afterwards, the image of every living creature within a 500 kilometer range was reflected in Nie Tian's mind.

It felt as if his soul had split into nine parts, which were infused into each Heaven Eye that was floating high in the sky.

The perception of his Heaven Eyes had also greatly improved over an incredibly short time.

Before, each of his Heaven Eyes was only able to perceive life within a few kilometers' range.

However, at this moment, thanks to the new-born, crystal-like chains and the stimulation of the strong aura of life, their perception range and sensitivity had increased by almost a hundred times.

Now, Nie Tian was even able to accurately detect the smallest insects in the depths of the earth within a 500 kilometer radius.

The location he was currently in was a desolate and uninhabited corner. Every inch of land was barren and lifeless.

The Realm of Unbounded Desolation was a strange place where not a single blade of grass grew. Even insects couldn't survive its

horrible climate. Powerful spirit beasts only roamed the volcanic areas where flame power was rich.

However, Nie Tian was able to detect four clusters of life aura aside from theirs within his perception range.

Three of them were constantly moving about and floating in the air.

Thus, Nie Tian was convinced that they belonged to powerful experts from the Tool Sect.

Only one cluster of life aura was hiding in the depths of the earth behind numerous isolation wards.

Even though the perception of his Heaven Eyes had skyrocketed, he was only barely able to catch a few wisps of the aura of that life.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

At this moment, Dong Li, Li Jing, and the others who were practicing cultivation in the same mountain valley as Nie Tian suddenly experienced abnormally accelerated heartbeats.

They all opened their eyes and glanced around. They knew something was causing the anomaly, yet couldn't identify it.

At the same time...

The three Profound realm Tool Sect experts who were searching in the vicinity also experienced accelerated heartbeats.

They were Zhu Bin, Zhen Huilan, who had returned from the Bone Sect's ruins empty-handed, and Qin Yi.

As soon as they experienced the anomaly in three different locations, they all stopped in midair and started scanning their surroundings with their immense, sea-like soul awarenesses.

Even so, they couldn't identify what was causing their abnormal heartbeat.

Aside from them, confusion also appeared in the eyes of the

fourth person - Zhao Shanling, who was holed up under the bottom of an enormous crater in the Bonebrutes' ruins.

At this moment, he was manipulating the Death Reign with his secret magics to fight Qi Bailu, even though the two of them were separated from each other by a tremendous distance.

Upon feeling the anomaly, he spared some attention to examine his heart, but didn't find anything.

Meanwhile, the accelerated heartbeat only lasted for a few seconds before resuming its normal state.

Therefore, Zhao Shanling didn't burden his mind with its cause. After all, he didn't think anyone in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation would be able to ferret him out from the depths of the earth and behind numerous isolation wards.

Even his junior martial sister, Zhen Huilan, who was also extremely skilled in spatial magics, wouldn't be able to do so.

Therefore, he refocused on his battle against Qi Bailu.

WHOOSH!

In the silent mountain valley, Nie Tian let out a long breath as his senses returned to him.

As he did, his wondrous ability of perceiving every move of every living creature within a 500 kilometer range around him disappeared after a few seconds.

The perception range of his Heaven Eyes shrank back to their original size.

That was when he realized that his previous heightened perception had only been caused when the strong aura of life had burst forth from within the green aura, giving birth to new crystal-like chains.

At this moment, the green aura had stopped forming new crystal-like chains, and thus his heightened perception was gone.

The newly-formed crystal-like chains were interweaving with the old ones, forming various formations, the countless green spots within them shining like the stars in the sky, as if they were imprinting something into his soul.

In the next moment, he sensed the awakening of a new bloodline talent in the deepest part of this soul. "Bloodline talent: Life Drain!"

At that very moment, Li Jing took the initiative to put her cultivation on hold. She rose to her feet and asked, "Did anyone else sense any anomalies just now? For some reason, just now my heartbeat suddenly accelerated, but returned to normal after a few seconds. Did you feel anything?"

"I felt the same thing!" Shen Xiu exclaimed.

Feng Luo and Yu Tong nodded as well.

Even Dong Li, who was sitting the closest to Nie Tian, exclaimed, "You all felt it? I thought I was the only one."

"This is odd..." Li Jing muttered, her eyebrows furrowed. "What could have caused that?"

Suspicious filled Dong Li's mind as she jerked around to look at Nie Tian. She discovered that Nie Tian's eyes were still closed, as if he were still practicing cultivation.

Even though she was sitting very close to Nie Tian, she didn't discover any sign that indicated that Nie Tian was the cause of the anomaly.

Under her gaze, Nie Tian continued to focus all of his attention on his newly acquired bloodline talent.

As he pondered the mysteries behind it over and over, he finally came to an enlightenment regarding this brand-new bloodline talent.

"Life Drain! It will allow me to forcibly drain the life force of

another living creature! I can clearly use this powerful bloodline talent in combat!”

If he were to use it on humans who focused solely on the cultivation of spiritual power, but didn't possess strong physical bodies or formidable bloodline power, the life force he would drain from them might be limited, and thus the drop in their battle prowess wouldn't be very significant.

However, if he were to use this Life Drain bloodline talent on spirit beasts that possessed tough bodies, or outsiders that emphasized the cultivation of their formidable bloodline power, the result would be stunning.

Almost all of the outsider races, including the Demons and the Phantasms, focused on the cultivation of bloodline power.

Most spirit beasts, which had developed from those outsiders' flesh and blood, possessed immense, sea-like life force.

If Nie Tian wished to use Life Drain during fights with them, he would only need to merge his own life aura with his spiritual power, and then send it into his enemies' bodies.

Once wisps of his life aura entered his enemies' bodies, they would start draining their life force and using it to strengthen Nie Tian's.

Most of the outsider races and spirit beasts shared the same source of power: their tremendous life force. However, once Nie Tian activated this new bloodline talent when facing them, not only would he greatly reduce his enemies' life force, but he would also make himself stronger and stronger.

“It appears that this bloodline talent will work especially well on outsiders that emphasize the cultivation of their physical bodies and bloodline power.” With these thoughts, Nie Tian's eyes snapped open as he suddenly thought of another matter.

“Zhao Shanling! The man hiding underground in the Bonebrutes'

former headquarters must be Zhao Shanling!”

Chapter 464: Returning A Favor

Seeing that Nie Tian had opened his eyes and awoken from his cultivation, Dong Li asked curiously, “Did your heart race earlier, Nie Tian?”

Nie Tian nodded. “Yeah, it did.”

Dong Li frowned, her eyes filled with confusion. “This is odd... There must be a reason behind it. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have all experienced it at the same time.”

“Yeah, perhaps something special happened just now. It’s just that we couldn’t tell what it was.” Nie Tian chimed in, though he knew in his heart that the sudden accelerated heartbeat Dong Li and the others had experienced just now had been caused by the transcendence of his bloodline.

Earlier, when new crystal-like chains had been created within the green aura in his heart, and his perception of life in his surroundings skyrocketed, he had detected the aura of four exceptionally vigorous lives within a 500 kilometer radius, as well as Dong Li and the others around him.

At that moment, all those who had been detected by him had experienced a sudden spike in their heartbeat.

Since he didn’t intend to share the uniqueness of his bloodline power or any of this with anyone, he pondered hard with furrowed eyebrows.

“Three of those four clusters of life aura were constantly on the move. They should have been Profound realm experts from the Tool Sect who are searching for Zhao Shanling. The fourth cluster of life aura was very subtle because it was isolated from the outside world by numerous spatial energy wards. I’m ninety percent sure that’s Zhao Shanling.

“He’s holed up underground in the Bonebrutes’ former

headquarters, controlling the Death Reign from hundreds of thousands of kilometers away.

“Perhaps I should inform a Tool Sect elder of Zhao Shanling’s hiding place.”

Zhao Shanling, who had returned from the space disruption zone, was the person behind the turmoil in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. As long as the Tool Sect could find and attack him, he wouldn’t be able to concentrate on manipulating the Death Reign.

The Death Reign’s destination was the Tool Sect’s headquarters, which meant it would have to pass the cluster of volcanoes where Li Ye and the other equipment forgers were forging spiritual tools for the assessment assembly.

Even though he had no ties with the Tool Sect, he cared about Li Ye and Pei Qiqi’s safety.

Furthermore, Zhen Huilan must still be closely attached to the Tool Sect. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have joined the search for Zhao Shanling.

He had never met Zhen Huilan in person. Nevertheless, he had found shelter in her residence after he left the Realm of Flame Heaven due to her close relationship with Hua Mu.

Not long ago, regarding Nie Tian’s relationship with the Blood Sect, she had not only indirectly saved Li Jing and Shen Xiu, but she had even allowed them to take Meng Qing’s Bone Giant with them.

After a brief pondering, he decided to inform a Tool Sect expert of Zhao Shanling’s hiding place.

It was just that many powerful experts from the Tool Sect, including the Profound realm Zhen Huilan and the Soul realm Wu Langxie, had been searching hard for some time, but failed to find anything.

Moreover, both Zhen Huilan and Wu Langxie had been to the Bone Sect, which was fairly close to the Bonebrutes' former headquarters.

As powerful as they were, they had failed to perceive Zhao Shanling's existence.

If he simply showed up and pointed out to a Tool Sect expert that Zhao Shanling had been hiding underground in the Bonebrutes' former headquarters this entire time, wouldn't it raise questions?

Would they believe him? Would they ask him how he had obtained such knowledge afterwards?

With such thoughts, he frowned, torn with indecision.

At that moment, Dong Li's raised voice caught his ears. As he turned to look, she seemed a bit angry. "What are you thinking about? Why don't you answer my question?"

Confusion spread across Nie Tian's face as he asked, "What did you say?" Since he had been wracking his mind for a way to inform the Tool Sect of Zhao Shanling's location without raising questions, he hadn't heard the question Dong Li just asked him.

"I said: do you think this place is safe, and do we need to switch to another location?" Dong Li repeated her question, her charming eyebrows slightly furrowed. "I have a bad feeling about our previously accelerated heartbeats. I think danger might be lurking in the dark. I know you have a keen perception of your surroundings, so I wanted to ask for your opinion."

"You're right." Nie Tian answered. "This location might not be very safe for us."

Having determined Zhao Shanling's location, he felt that they were rather close to him. It would be safer if they moved to a location that was further away from him.

Dong Li's eyes grew wide. "Really? Show us a direction that's safe then!"

Even the middle Profound realm Li Jing was present, but she had decided to ask for Nie Tian's opinion instead of Li Jing's. This indicated what kind of position Nie Tian held in her heart.

Gazing at the concerned Dong Li, Nie Tian thought of an idea: he might as well hand this tough matter to her.

He had long since known Dong Li as a thorny rose. The fact that she had been able to save Li Jing and Shen Xiu by framing people from the Bone Sect was enough evidence of her cunningness.

Furthermore, everyone knew the key to end the turmoil in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation lay with Zhao Shanling.

Finding Zhao Shanling would be considered a major meritorious service. This was actually a good chance to distinguish himself and win attention.

However, considering his special identity, unique bloodline, the fact that he had mysteriously gone missing with the Spirit Pearl in the Realm of Dark Underworld, and most important of all, his unpleasant history with Wu Ling, it wouldn't necessarily be a good thing if he attract too many eyes.

On the other hand, Dong Li had helped him on many occasions.

Back when he had been locked down by the Spirit Pearl in the Realm of Dark Underworld, Dong Li had followed his instructions without the slightest hesitation, and taken him away from the lake with the help of her black phoenix. Not long ago, she had set up members of the Bone Sect and saved Li Jing.

Before he knew it, the relationship between him and this woman had already changed from being irreconcilable enemies to allies who fight side by side.

After a thorough consideration, he decided to give this opportunity to determine the fate of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to Dong Li.

With this decision in mind, Nie Tian called out to Li Jing, who

was sitting not far from him, “Senior Li, Dong Li just received a message from a senior of her clan that says the location we’re in isn’t safe.”

Upon hearing these words, Dong Li was confused at first, but nodded immediately afterwards to uphold Nie Tian’s statement.

Nie Tian marveled at her intelligence inwardly, thinking she did make an excellent teammate.

Surprised and confused, Li Jing rose to her feet in a graceful fashion and asked, “Where is safer then?”

Pointing in a direction, Nie Tian said, “500 kilometers down that way. We’ll be much safer over there.”

Li Jing nodded and rapidly summoned her Blood Lotus. Then, she beckoned for Nie Tian to jump on board. “Come on. I’ll take you there.”

Shen Xiu, Feng Luo, and Yu Tong also fixed their gazes on him.

At that moment, Nie Tian shook his head and said with an apologetic tone, “You go first, Senior Li. Dong Li and I will come for you in a couple of days. That senior of hers is worried about her safety, and she’s on her way here. I’ll stay and keep Dong Li safe. Also, I have a friend in the Dong Clan. I want to ask about his situation.”

“I see.” Li Jing didn’t ask any questions. “Alright, we’re off then. Come and find us as soon as you’re finished.”

“I will,” Nie Tian promised.

Then, Li Jing beckoned for Shen Xiu, Feng Luo, and Yu Tong to jump onto the Blood Lotus.

After they were on board, Li Jing thought briefly before she turned to Dong Li and said, “Thank you for helping us. Please give my regards to your senior. If members of the Dong Clan ever come to the Realm of Flame Heaven, all they need to do is state their

identity, and we'll receive them with our highest standards."

Dong Li smiled gracefully. "Thanks, will do."

"Take care." With these words, the Blood Lotus rose into the air and sped off towards the distant horizon.

After Li Jing and the others left, Dong Li pursed her lips into a smile and said, "I saw the way that girl named Yu Tong looked at you before they left. She seemed to be rather reluctant to leave. She has a pretty face, but she's just a bit young and immature. Did you two ever...?"

"No," Nie Tian denied.

"It'd be a wonder if you didn't." Dong Li rolled her eyes at him, but didn't dwell on the matter. "Okay, now, tell me why you sent those people from the Blood Sect away and what you want with me."

As smart as she was, she had seen through Nie Tian's little trick since Nie Tian's first sentence.

Nie Tian was surprised. "You knew I sent them away on purpose? Does that mean Senior Li also knew?"

Dong Li smiled. "Of course they did. They aren't stupid. They just didn't want to point it out." With these words, she stretched, showing the perfect curves of her chest. Nie Tian couldn't help but take a few glances at it.

"I don't know them anyways," said Dong Li. "Their leaving suits me fine."

She seemed to catch Nie Tian peeping at her chest, and thus deliberated slowed her stretching motion. When Nie Tian's gaze was fully caught by her ample breasts, she abruptly recovered. Looking into Nie Tian's eyes, she smiled.

Nie Tian, who had long since grown used to her taunting, didn't seem embarrassed at all. Rather, he remained calm and composed.

Dong Li seemed to have had her fun. Her watery eyes rippled with a charming light as she looked at Nie Tian with an anticipating expression on her smiling face. “Alright, tell me. What do you want with me?”

“I’m certain that Zhao Shanling is currently hiding under the bottom of huge crater in the Bonebrutes’ former headquarters,” Nie Tian brought out the truth with a solemn tone. “He has sealed himself up within multiple spatial energy wards so that no soul consciousness can reach him. But don’t ask me how I know.”

A shudder ran through Dong Li’s tender body.

She didn’t utter a word, but various looks rapidly flashed across her eyes, as if she were pondering what she would do with such information.

Moments later, she opened her mouth. “Why are you telling me?”

She didn’t ask Nie Tian how he had learned about it, nor how certain he was.

This meant she had faith in Nie Tian’s judgment.

Even though what Nie Tian said was far beyond her imagination, she didn’t question him in the slightest.

Nie Tian could feel her absolute trust. Touched, he said sincerely, “I’m only telling you because I trust you.”

Dong Li’s charming eyes glittered as she nodded gently, a hearty smile appearing at the corner of her mouth.

“I know it’s better that I keep a low profile, so I figure you can give the information to the Tool Sect,” Nie Tian said.

“Are you aware that once they find Zhao Shanling because of this piece of information, the situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will be different? For the Tool Sect, whoever helps them find Zhao Shanling will be considered a hero who has saved

them from a calamity.” Dong Li pointed out the importance of such information.

Nie Tian smiled. “I owe you a lot, don’t I? Consider this as a favor returned to you.”

Dong Li’s eyes lit up. “You fool. You have no idea how valuable this opportunity is!” She flashed to Nie Tian’s side, bringing a whiff of her scent to Nie Tian’s face, and kissed him lightly on the cheek, like a dragonfly touching the water’s surface.

Looking at the dumbstruck Nie Tian, she said, smiling, “I’ll take it, little brother.”

Chapter 465: Another Lie

Rubbing his cheek where Dong Li's lips had been, Nie Tian was dumbstruck.

He hadn't expected that Dong Li would kiss him.

Dong Li's face blossomed into a bright smile. "You should look at your face. Now, you look even more like a fool."

Instead of backing away after initiating the kiss, she pressed herself close to Nie Tian and said with a flirtatious tone, "Alright, tell me: how do you propose I inform the people from the Tool Sect?"

Nie Tian snapped out of his daze and said, "I suppose some Tool Sect elders are still searching in the vicinity."

"But as you know, I'm not good at finding people," Dong Li said.

Nie Tian nodded. "I'll take care of that."

Eyes narrowed, he got ahold of his bearings and sped towards the Bonebrutes' former headquarters.

Of the three clusters of life aura he had detected earlier, that one was the closest to them.

Dong Li followed along and said, "Try not to say anything from now on. I'll do the talking so that the people from the Tool Sect don't question your identity."

"That's what I was thinking," Nie Tian said with a smile.

He secretly commanded his nine Heaven Eyes to fly towards the direction where he and Dong Li were heading, hoping to find that Tool Sect expert he had detected earlier as soon as possible.

Two hours later, when one of his Heaven Eyes discovered that expert, Nie Tian immediately withdrew it.

The other eight Heaven Eyes also vanished at lightning speed as

soon as he withdrew his soul power from them.

It wasn't long before Qi Yin's soul awareness, which he had unleashed to search for Zhao Shanling, caught the aura of Nie Tian and Dong Li.

Qin Yi immediately flew towards the two of them.

Within seconds, he appeared in the air above Nie Tian and Dong Li's heads. Surprised by the sight of Dong Li, he said, "Dong Li? How come you're here?"

Dong Li looked up and discovered that it was Qin Yi. Overjoyed, she said, "Why are you here, Great Grandpa Qin?"

Qin Yi was from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, Qin Yan's great grandfather. Since Dong Li was good friends with Qin Yan, and she had met him on many occasions before, she recognized him at once.

"I asked a friend to forge me a spiritual tool here in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. The equipment forging turned out to be a failure, but I came to learn about the return of Zhao Shanling and his Death Reign. Therefore, I'm helping the Tool Sect find that traitor." With these words, Qin Yi descended from midair, and his gaze landed on Nie Tian. "Who's this?"

"Oh, he's a friend of mine," Dong Li answered without thinking.

Looking deeply at Nie Tian, a flash of light flashed across Qin Yi's eyes as he exclaimed, "Is this the Wu Tian who went to the Realm of Dark Underworld with you?"

Even though he was friends with Hua Mu, since Hua Mu had never told him about Nie Tian, he didn't know that Wu Tian was actually Nie Tian.

However, as one of the chiefs of the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, he had learned about what had happened in the Realm of Dark Underworld not long ago.

After returning from the Water Moon Chamber of Commerce, Qin Yan had told him everything about their exploration trip to the Realm of Dark Underworld.

The only thing she had held back was the fact that Wu Tian was actually Nie Tian, because she had promised Dong Li that she would keep that a secret.

Therefore, Qin Yi only knew that a young man named Wu Tian, who was a subordinate of Dong Li, had played an important role in their exploration trip before he had eventually gone missing with a mysterious object forged by the Phantasms.

Later, when everyone on the exploration team had returned to the Realm of Dark Underworld, Dong Li was the only one who had stayed there for some reason. The entire Dong Clan had worried about her safety.

The moment Dong Li saw Qin Yi, she knew she wouldn't be able to keep Nie Tian's identity as Wu Tian from him, and thus said, "Yes, this is Wu Tian."

Many people from the Realm of a Hundred Battles had seen the mask Nie Tian was wearing, which had been given to him by Dong Baijie as a gift. A brief inspection, and Qin Yi would learn that the young man before him was the 'Wu Tian' who had been to the Realm of Dark Underworld with Dong Li and many others.

Knowing that she wouldn't be able to withhold it from Qin Yi, she decided to admit to it.

However, she was slightly worried, not sure if Qin Yan had kept the fact that Wu Tian was another identity of Nie Tian's from Qin Yi.

"Now that he's still alive, what happened to the Phantasms' mysterious object?" Qin Yi asked naturally.

Dong Li smiled bitterly. "It was already a miracle that he survived that formidable object, great grandpa. Are you telling me

that you expected him to secure it while he came back?”

Qin Yi thought for a while. Eyes narrowed, he checked Nie Tian’s cultivation base again, and then said with a nod, “You’re probably right. That’s a bit much to ask for a person at his cultivation level.”

Confirming that Nie Tian was only at the early Greater Heaven stage, the same as Dong Li, he deemed he didn’t seem to have what it took to secure a formidable object forged by the Phantasms.

Afterwards, he said, “The Realm of Unbounded Desolation is under great turmoil now. Try not to wander around, and don’t return to Desolate City for now. You’ve always been a resourceful and smart kid. I trust that you know how to protect yourself during such times...”

Before he could finish, Dong Li interrupted him with a wry smile on her face. “Alright, alright, great grandpa. I know that you want me to stay out of danger, but I came out here for a reason. I wanted to find an Tool Sect elder who was searching for Zhao Shanling. Of course, it was even better to run into you instead of someone else.”

“What do you mean?” Qin Yi seemed confused.

“I know where Zhao Shanling is hiding!” Dong Li said with a decisiveness that could sever nails and chop iron.

Qin Yi shook his head. “This is not something to joke about, kiddo. I know you’re mischievous and full of tricks, but this isn’t the time for jokes. Elders from the Tool Sect and many powerful experts who are close to the Tool Sect are turning over every stone in the Realm of Boundless Desolation in search of Zhao Shanling, but no one has found anything yet. How could you have found him?”

A wronged expression appeared on Dong Li’s face. “How would I dare joke about such a matter? Zhao Shanling is hiding underground in the Bonebrutes’s former headquarters. I’m sure of it! Great grandpa, I need you to trust me this time. Take some

powerful experts from the Tool Sect there, and dig deep into the ground. I promise you that you'll find Zhao Shanling there!"

Qin Yi frowned. "What makes you so sure?"

Dong Li's expression grew incomparably serious as she explained, "Wu Tian and I passed by that area quite a few times. We noticed that one of the craters seemed to have been touched by someone. I didn't know what it was back then. But afterwards, I heard that Zhao Shanling had returned to the Realm of Boundless Desolation and holed up somewhere. That was when I suspected that the man who had disturbed the bottom of that crater was most likely Zhao Shanling!"

Nie Tian inwardly marveled at how skilled Dong Li was at lying.

She didn't even blush in the slightest as she told the lie, as if she deeply believed what she was saying herself.

Qin Yi snorted out a laugh. "That doesn't necessarily mean that it's Zhao Shanling. Even though almost no one goes to the Bonebrutes' former headquarters now, it wouldn't surprise me if someone other than Zhao Shanling went there to hide from their enemy. What makes you so sure it is Zhao Shanling?"

A hint of hesitation appeared on Dong Li's face as she said, "Well... You're right. It may be someone else, but there's a chance it may be him, right? Since you haven't found any sign of him yet, you might as well go over there and try your luck, right? What if that person is Zhao Shanling?"

After a moment of pondering, Qin Yi nodded, saying, "Alright, I'll notify someone."

With these words, he took out a Sound Stone and started communicating with Zhen Huilan.

Moments later, intense spatial energy ripples appeared beside him, along with an expanding spot of light, creating an unfathomable spatial tunnel in the middle of nothing.

Zhen Huilan floated weightlessly out of the spatial tunnel, which didn't disappear right away.

"That was quick!" Qin Yi exclaimed.

"Is she the one who told you about the anomaly in a crater in the Bonebrutes' former headquarters?" Zhen Huilan asked.

Then, staring at Dong Li, she let out a cold snort and said, "You must be the kid from the Dong Clan."

"Greetings, Master Zhen," Dong Li said with great respect.

"Not long ago, Zhu Bin messaged me that Meng Qing from the Bone Sect might have something to do with Zhao Shanling," Zhen Huilan said. "After we rushed over there, Mr. Wu ran through Meng Qing's memories of the past year, but failed to discover anything about Zhao Shanling."

Dong Li felt a bit nervous under her penetrating gaze. "Umm... but I did hear those people from the Bone Sect talk about Zhao Shanling."

Zhen Huilan held her temper. "Fine, I'll give you the benefit of doubt and trust you one more time. But you're coming with me."

As a drowning man would clutch at a straw, even though she had already searched the Bonebrute's former headquarters more than once and left empty-handed, she decided to go and search again.

Of course, she had only searched with her soul awareness and spatial energy magics. She hadn't tried actually digging into the ground.

Furthermore, she had just received word that her senior martial brother Qi Bailu didn't seem to be able to stop the Death Reign. Soon, he might be forced to withdraw to the Tool Sect.

Under such circumstances, she couldn't afford to pass up any information regarding Zhao Shanling's whereabouts, truthful or false.

“Let’s go,” Qin Yi said.

Chapter 466: A Crisis Appearing Out of the Blue

Dong Li grabbed Nie Tian and stepped into the spatial tunnel first.

In the next moment, she and Nie Tian appeared in the Bonebrutes' former headquarters, which was hundreds of kilometers from where they had been a moment before. Looking back, they saw the spatial tunnel floating in the air, three meters from the ground.

Having just witnessed and traveled through this shocking creation of Zhen Huilan's, Nie Tian was still in a state of bewilderment.

However, Dong Li hastily summoned her black phoenix and took the two of them right up into the sky. Anxious, she said, "Hurry, before they arrive, tell me which crater it is."

Nie Tian realized what she was thinking. Rapidly glancing around, he determined the crater relying on his memories from not long ago and said, "That's the one!"

"Good!" Dong Li instantly felt relieved and confident again.

Then, she commanded the black phoenix to come lower. When they reached a safe height, she dropped Nie Tian from the air.

She continued to hover in the air with the help of the black phoenix, pretending she was still trying to determine the location of the crater.

After assuming a firm foothold on the ground, Nie Tian gazed at the spatial tunnel which was floating not far from him, absorbed in thought. "Master Zhen..."

He pondered whether Zhen Huilan had recognized him or not.

Years ago, when Hua Mu had taken him to her residence in

Shatter City, she had been there as well.

Even though he had never met her in person during the time he had been there, considering Zhen Huilan's profound cultivation base and attainments, she must have been able to observe him without actually appearing.

However, at that time, he hadn't yet acquired the mask he was wearing now.

By the time he had received it from Dong Baijie, Zhen Huilan had long since left Shatter City.

Zhen Huilan probably knew his actual appearance, but not the face he was wearing now. As for whether she was able to recognize him through his life aura or not, Nie Tian couldn't be sure.

On the other side of the spatial tunnel, Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi didn't rush into it.

"That girl from the Dong Clan has done quite a few crooked things in the Realm of Split Void under the name 'Song Li'," Zhen Huilan said with furrowed eyebrows.

Smiling, Qin Yi said, "That was nothing but child's play."

He had also heard about the things Dong Li had done in the Realm of Split Void. Not very long ago, Dong Li had returned to the Dong Clan from the Realm of Split Void and complained to Qin Yan about being humiliated by a young man named Hua Tian.

Since Hua Tian had lived in Zhen Huilan's residence in Shatter City, he clearly had some sort of connection with her.

However, Qin Yi wasn't aware that Hua Tian and Wu Tian were both Nie Tian's assumed names.

He only knew that Zhen Huilan's poor opinion of Dong Li had a great deal to do with the fact that she had pursued Hua Tian across the Realm of Split Void and sworn to kill him.

"Never mind. Hua Tian didn't suffer any losses from her

anyways.” Zhen Huilan wanted to end the topic.

“Who’s Hua Tian anyway?” Qin Yi asked, curious.

“That’s not important.” Apparently, Zhen Huilan didn’t want to answer that. “If this girl misleads me again and wastes more of my time, I’ll have to teach her a lesson.”

Qin Yi had sensed from her previous conversation with Dong Li that Dong Li had misled her once before.

Considering she wasn’t fond of her in the first place, if she continued to feed her false information about Zhao Shanling, she probably would actually get angry at her.

“I hope the kid is right this time,” Qin Yi thought to himself, starting to worry for Dong Li.

“Let’s go.” Zhen Huilan decided not to waste any more of her precious time. In the blink of an eye, she and Qin Yi traveled through the spatial tunnel and appeared in the Bonebrutes’ former headquarters.

She looked up and saw Dong Li hovering about in the air with the help of her black phoenix, as if she were trying very hard to locate where Zhao Shanling was hiding.

Without paying any attention to Nie Tian, they shot up into the sky and came to a stop by Dong Li’s side.

“Found it yet, kid?” Qin Yi asked.

Zhen Huilan looked at her, expressionless.

After a while of pretended searching, Dong Li had already calmed herself. With a serious face, she pointed down at one of the craters and said, “That’s the one!”

As Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi’s gazes followed her hand to an enormous crater, they started examining it with their soul awareness and exquisite incantations.

However, even though they were both at the late Profound

realm, they failed to spot any anomalies in the crater.

“Under the bottom of the crater!” Dong Li grew very nervous as she lowered her voice and added, “It’s said that Zhao Shanling is currently at the early Soul realm. If it’s really him down there, we...”

Qin Yi’s eyebrows also furrowed.

After a moment of pondering, he asked with a straight face, “How certain are you, Dong Li?”

“About eighty percent,” With these words, Dong Li snuck a glance at Nie Tian.

Nie Tian nodded in a very subtle way.

Reassured, Dong Li started moving towards Nie Tian as she said, “S-senior Zhen, if you no longer need my service, I think it’s time for me leave.”

Her intense nervousness and caution made Zhen Huilan and Qin Yan start to believe her speculation.

After arriving by Nie Tian’s side, Dong Li grabbed him and urged, “It’s not safe here. We need to leave now. Zhao Shanling is very deadly. If he somehow emerges, our lives will be in serious danger!”

Nie Tian came to realize that she was right.

Both Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi were at the late Profound realm, while Zhao Shanling was at the early Soul realm.

Before the arrival of another Soul realm expert, Zhao Shanling’s battle prowess would be unmatched.

Once battle broke out, he and Dong Li, who were only at the early Greater Heaven stage, would most likely be dragged into it. Meanwhile, Dong Li, who had just pointed out Zhao Shanling’s location, would most likely become his target.

After coming to such realization, he cooperated fully.

Dong Li grabbed him and carried him towards the spatial tunnel that hadn't vanished yet, hoping to travel back to their original location, which was hundreds of kilometers away.

At that very moment, unstable fluctuations appeared at the entrance of the spatial tunnel created by Zhen Huilan. Immediately afterwards, multiple glowing blades of spatial energy emerged from within it.

Stopping before the entrance of the spatial tunnel, an angry look appeared in Dong Li's eyes as she questioned Zhen Huilan, "What's this supposed to mean, Senior Zhen? You don't want us to leave?"

Nie Tian also gazed up at Zhen Huilan, who was floating high and afar.

However, before he could get a clear view of Zhen Huilan's expression, Dong Li let out a sharp cry and instantly took him up into the sky with the help of the black phoenix.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

One after another, the glowing blades of spatial energy shot out of the spatial tunnel towards them.

Fortunately, Dong Li swiftly rose into the sky with Nie Tian, and avoided being cut up by the light blades. Even so, they broke out in a cold sweat.

Just as he was confused and also wanted to question Zhen Huilan about her intentions, he caught sight of Dong Li's ghastly and frightened face.

He jerked his head around to look at Zhen Huilan.

He discovered that her face had also turned very grave, and that she was already holding a paper folding fan, as if she were facing formidable foes.

Waves of spatial energy that were visible to the naked eye suddenly burst forth from within the blank fan, making the space

where Zhen Huilan was blurry, as if she was being protected by multiple spatial energy wards.

Qin Yin's expression also flickered as he emanated dazzling golden light. Immediately afterwards, a suit of golden armor appeared on him.

"It wasn't her! Let's get out of here!" Dong Li screamed, panicked.

BANG!

At that moment, the spatial tunnel created by Zhen Huilan exploded, sending countless glowing blades of spatial energy towards Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi.

Nie Tian instantly understood what was happening.

The spatial light blades shooting out of the spatial tunnel weren't the doing of Zhen Huilan, but rather the other spatial energy master who was also in this location!

"Zhao Shanling! It's him indeed!" Qin Yi shouted as he hastily took out his Sound Stone and informed the powerful experts from the Tool Sect of what was happening here.

Wild laughter suddenly echoed out from the bottom of the crater Dong Li had just pointed out for Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi. "Hahaha! Long time no see, junior martial sister!"

The rocks at the bottom of the crater exploded, unveiling multiple invisible spatial energy wards.

Behind the wards sat a skinny old man that looked like a bag of bones. Dressed in gray robes, he looked up with a sinister smile.

"You're no senior martial brother of mine!" Face especially grim, Zhen Huilan fluttered the folding fan in her hand, and waves of torrential spatial energy rushed out and engulfed the spatial light blades. Then, with a low voice, she asked Qin Yi, "When will Wu Langxie get here?"

“Soon!” Qin Yi answered in a low but determined voice.

Zhen Huilan nodded as she turned to look at Dong Li and Nie Tian, who were floating in the distance, shouting, “What are you waiting for? Leave!”

Upon hearing her words, Dong Li instantly activated all of her reserve power. Like a streak of black light, they shot into the distant sky.

Chapter 467: Zhao Shanling

BOOM!

The black phoenix rammed into an invisible ward. Dong Li and Nie Tian's dashing momentum was instantly stopped.

Zhao Shanling, who was originally sitting at the bottom of the crater, blurred into action, and in a split second, he was floating in midair.

Staring at Dong Li from afar, he asked, looking rather confused, "How did you find me, girl?"

In fact, he had noticed her and Nie Tian as soon as they had come out of the spatial tunnel created by Zhen Huilan.

However, since their cultivation bases were incredibly low, he hadn't attached any importance to them. After all, many Tool Sect elders had come to search in this area and failed to find any traces of him.

After a mere glance, he had refocused on his battle against Qi Bailu, not caring what Dong Li and Nie Tian said to each other.

Only when Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi had come and learned about his hiding place from her had he finally realized that he had been put in an unfavorable situation.

That was when he had paid serious attention to Dong Li and wondered how she had been able to locate him.

The fact that he had never seen her come to this area, and yet she had pointed out his hiding place with great precision, confused him.

He didn't know that Nie Tian, who was beside her, was actually the one who had found him.

"Why would I tell you?" With these words, Dong Li, who had already summoned her cyan awl, started using it to repeatedly

bombard the invisible spatial energy ward. After discovering that her efforts were fruitless, she commanded the black phoenix to take them to another location, hoping to break free from there.

Nie Tian was being carried the whole time, observing everything around him.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Every time the black phoenix tried to break free from another location, they would ram into an invisible ward. After failing to escape after numerous attempts, Dong Li started to look anxious and insecure.

At this moment, the numerous waves of spatial energy Zhen Huilan had created with the flutter of her folding fan were spreading towards Zhao Shanling.

Amidst the spatial energy fluctuations were raging flames, which seemed to be flickering with the profound truths of fire.

With a grim expression, Qin Yi let out an angry roar. In the next moment, he seemed to turn into a giant clad in a suit of golden armor, throwing a fist strike directly towards Zhao Shanling.

Fierce, golden light and golden lightning bolts exploded from within the enormous fist, which was bearing down with the force of tens of thousands of pounds, enveloping the area where Zhao Shaling was floating.

Looking at the giant, golden fist and the fierce, golden lightning, Nie Tian marveled at the profound might of metal power.

SHEW! SHEW! SHEW!

The sky-filling golden light and lightning bolts interacted in midair, morphing into thick lightning bolts that eventually interwove into a gigantic net of golden lightning.

As Qin Yi's fist continued to fall, the net of golden lightning smashed down towards Zhao Shanling with the momentum of a

mountain falling from the sky.

Seeing that both Zhen Huilan and Qin Yi had revealed their full strength the moment he showed himself, Zhao Shanling's expression flickered slightly.

At this moment, the majority of his mind and soul were still focused on manipulating the Death Reign to fight Qi Bailu.

He was aware that now that he had been discovered, many powerful experts from the Tool Sect, including Wu Langxie, would swarm towards his location. Therefore, he made a decision at this crucial moment.

He instantly ended his battle against Qi Bailu, which was taking place hundreds of thousands kilometers away, and controlled the Death Reign to return to him using his mind and soul.

At that very moment, the enormous net of golden lightning enveloped his floating body. Immediately afterwards, Qin Yi's giant golden fist smashed down on him.

BANG!

Upon the incomparably strong impact, Zhao Shanling's body shattered, and pieces of him shot in every direction like bits of broken glass.

His broken body passed through the grid of the huge net of golden lightning bolts.

Nie Tian was flabbergasted. "What?! He just died like that?!"

Dong Li's expression turned especially grim. "If only it were that easy.... He's a master of spatial magics. How could he be so easily killed? Back in the day, that man was notoriously deadly in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Even his own master died because of him. He would never be so fragile and unable to withstand a single blow."

Nie Tian's pupils suddenly shrunk as he watched Zhao Shanling's

shattered body that looked like broken glass gather to a single point after shooting through the lightning net.

In the blink of an eye, Zhao Shanling returned to human form, unscathed and expression as calm as ever.

Shaking his head, he said, “You’re being too sloppy by coming for me with just the two of you. Didn’t think I would kill you, did you?”

With these words, he turned to Qin Yi and said with a cold snort, “I’m actually a man who treasures old ties. After all, my junior martial sister and I learned from the same master. Even though she has some misunderstandings about me, I can’t bear to kill her with my own hands. But who the hell do you think you are? This is between me and my sect. Who gave you the right to meddle with our internal affairs?”

With these words, he cast out a crimson, metal cauldron with a casual fling of his hand.

The crimson cauldron had three legs and was covered in elegant and simple patterns. Raging lava spewed out of its mouth unceasingly.

One stream of fierce lava after another shot up and converged on Qin Yi’s huge, golden fist like numerous long, crimson rivers.

A glittering, golden glove seemed to exist at the center of the immeasurably large, golden fist, which appeared to be Qin Yi’s spiritual tool.

However, as the rivers of boiling lava sprayed on the golden fist, which was formed by Qin Yi’s pure spiritual power, the huge fist was instantly ignited and started to shrink.

The normal-sized golden glove in the middle of it also instantly grew dim and lifeless.

Qin Yi let out a muffled groan as his expression flickered dramatically, yet his eyes shone brightly with golden light.

After neutralizing the golden fist with its burning lava, the crimson cauldron started floating towards Qin Yi.

Zhao Shanling laughed madly. “Even though there seems to be a fine line between the late Profound realm and the early Soul realm, you should know how big the gap really is. I’ve already achieved my goal on this trip. I can leave or stay as I want. I admit that there are quite a few people with cultivation bases higher than mine in the Domain of the Falling Stars, but, since master has died, the next person who can trap me hasn’t been born yet!”

FIZZ! FIZZ!

With these words, a spatial portal slowly opened behind Zhao Shanling.

Countless rays of light could be seen flashing across within it, as if they were paths to different spaces where endless and unknown danger was lurking.

Gazing at the spatial portal created by Zhao Shanling, Zhen Huilan’s expression flickered slightly, as if she knew that Zhao Shanling’s statement was true.

As a master of spatial magics herself, she was well-aware of the meaning of the appearance of that portal, which even she wouldn’t dare to step into rashly. Zhao Shanling was planning to leave through it.

There were very few masters of spatial magics throughout the entire Domain of the Falling Stars. Zhen Huilan had only ever known one person who was equally as skilled in spatial magics as Zhao Shanling - her master.

Unfortunately, her master had already died.

As for cultivators who weren’t skilled in spatial magics, even if their cultivation bases were higher than Zhao Shanling’s, they wouldn’t be able to stop him from leaving unless they had shattered the barriers in their cultivation and joined the ranks of

the three domains.

However, not a single person in the Domain of the Falling Stars had managed to enter the Void domain, the Saint Domain, or the God Domain yet.

That meant even if Wu Langxie and Qi Bailu were here, the lot of them wouldn't be able to kill Zhao Shanling or trap him in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

With such thoughts on her mind, Zhen Huilan couldn't help but feel deeply helpless and worried about the future of their sect.

By the time Xia Yi from the Flame God Sect had refined the earthflame essence he had gathered and broken through into the late Soul realm, he would be able to overtake every powerful expert in the Tool Sect one-on-one. Even if Qi Bailu and Wu Langxie teamed up, it would still be hard to say if they would be able to stop Xia Yi and his ally, Zhao Shanling, who possessed the Death Reign...

Zhen Huilan didn't dare to further her thoughts.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

One river of burning lava after another shot out from within the crimson cauldron and arrived before Qin Yi in the blink of an eye.

Sighing inwardly, Zhen Huilan cast out her folding fan, forming multiple spatial energy wards to stop the incoming rivers of raging lava. Then, she said to Qin Yi in a low voice, "Wu Langxie and my eldest martial brother will be here soon. I believe the traitor's vengeful trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation is coming to an end, but I doubt that we'll be able to kill him, even together."

"So you mean...?" Qin Yi asked with a grim expression.

"Don't go all-out to attack him anymore." Zhen Huilan said helplessly. "Stall him and wait for the arrival of Wu Langxie and my eldest martial brother."

SHEW!

An incomparably thick bolt of lightning suddenly appeared in the distant sky.

With loud rumbles, it shot directly towards Nie Tian and Dong Li's location at an alarming speed, and in a brief moment, shattered the invisible spatial energy ward Zhao Shanling had created. Then, as the lightning cleared, Zhu Bin emerged.

Seeing that the ward was down, Dong Li was overjoyed, and immediately flew away with Nie Tian.

"Let's go!" Dong Li blurted. "A battle at such a level isn't something we can take part in. It's gonna be too dangerous for us if we stay."

Nie Tian, who was being carried farther and farther away, frowned as he gazed at Zhao Shanling, who was still laughing madly, as if there was no one in this world he would fear.

Zhao Shanling had committed unforgivable crimes by plunging the people in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation into misery and suffering and even killing his own master. However, due to his unmatched expertise in spatial magics, Soul realm cultivation base, and the Death Reign at his disposal, no one seemed to be able to subdue him.

The wild arrogance and rampancy on display gave Nie Tian a very deep impression, and left him in a shocked state for a long while.

Chapter 468: Post-war Battlefield

In fact, Zhao Shanling cared about neither the shattering of that spatial energy ward, nor the escape of Nie Tian and Dong Li.

He was indeed somewhat curious as to how Dong Li had managed to locate him.

However, such curiosity wasn't so strong that it would motivate him to stop Dong Li from leaving regardless of everything else.

Therefore, seeing that Dong Li and Nie Tian had broken free from the spatial energy ward he had created and were flying further and further away, he didn't make another move.

His attention remained focused on the three opponents before him.

As they flew further and further away with the help of the black phoenix, Dong Li's furrowed brow finally gradually relaxed. "It's not always a bad thing that our cultivation bases are low. Like this time, it's all because our cultivation bases are too low to make any difference that Zhao Shanling didn't give a damn about our escape. He might be just a little bit curious as to how I managed to find him, but he won't come after us."

Hugged by Dong Li from behind, Nie Tian listened to the whistling wind as they traveled high in the air. Looking back at the intense energy fluctuations in the Bonebrutes' former headquarters, he nodded and said with a grim expression, "You're right. Zhao Shanling didn't attach any importance to us. Considering his cultivation base and diverse means, even though Zhu Bin rushed to our aid, he would have no problem capturing us if he wanted to."

"We were saved by our insignificant cultivation bases," Dong Li said with a thankful tone.

As they continued flying further away, they saw a number of

Profound realm experts flashing through the air towards the Bonebrutes' former headquarters.

Most of them were from the Tool Sect, and were probably rushing over after receiving word from Zhen Huilan, Qin Yi, and Zhu Bin that they had found Zhao Shanling there.

Some of them noticed Dong Li and Nie Tian, yet none of them even bothered to stop.

Apparently, their primary goal was Zhao Shanling. Anyone or anything else was intentionally blocked from their minds.

WHOOSH!

The black phoenix started plunging towards a silent mountain valley as Dong Li said, "Prepare for landing. I can't control the black phoenix to fly for much longer. We'll have to march on foot from now on."

Nie Tian nodded, showing that he understood.

It was sundown. The evening glow filled the sky. Nie Tian seemed somewhat depressed as he was carried down from midair.

After landing smoothly, the black phoenix flew back into Dong Li's head. She gulped down a few medicinal pills and urged Nie Tian to keep marching away from the Bonebrutes' former headquarters on foot with her.

That was when Nie Tian noticed that the direction Dong Li was heading in wasn't towards the location where Li Jing and the other Blood Sect members would be waiting for him.

Confusion appeared in his eyes.

"Now that Zhao Shanling's hiding place has been exposed, the turbulent situation in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation will most likely come to an end within a short time," Dong Li explained. "In such a sensitive period of time, you'd better quit thinking about gathering more earthflame essence. The way I see

it, Desolate City and the Tool Sect's headquarters are the safest places right now. We no longer need to join those from the Blood Sect."

Earlier, in order to break free from Zhao Shanling's spatial energy blockade, Dong Li had rammed into the blockade in many different locations, like a brainless fly flying into the wall repeatedly.

Later, when Zhu Bin had shattered the spatial energy ward, she had finally seen a chance, and thus escaped without thinking.

The location where Zhu Bin had broken the ward hadn't been in line with the direction of the people from Blood Sect. Meanwhile, Dong Li hadn't thought about joining the people from the Blood Sect at all. Rather, her destination had always been Desolate City or the Tool Sect's headquarters.

"Sectmaster Li and the others won't be in danger, will they?" Nie Tian seemed worried.

Dong Li chuckled softly. "Rest assured. They'll be fine. Sectmaster Li is a middle Profound realm expert, after all. Not many people can hurt her. Besides, Wu Langxie seriously wounded Meng Qing's soul by using his soul transmitting art on him. Plus, he also lost his Bone Giant to Sectmaster Li. With such a significant drop in his battle prowess, even if he met Sectmaster Li again, he wouldn't be able to do anything to her."

Upon hearing these words, Nie Tian felt slightly relieved.

"Furthermore, Sectmaster Li and the others will soon learn about the twist in the situation, and that the turmoil that has horrified the Realm of Unbounded Desolation is coming to an end. By that time, they'll naturally return to Desolate City." Dong Li seemed relaxed as she added, "If you still want to see them, I'll arrange for people from my clan to help you look for them after we get back to Desolate City."

When she and Nie Tian had first come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, she hadn't contacted any Dong Clan members here for the purpose of discretion.

Now that Qin Yi had seen her and she had pointed out Zhao Shanling's hiding place with Nie Tian's help, people would definitely start talking about her shortly.

Therefore, there would be no need for her to continue to hide from people's attention. After returning to Desolate City, she would be free to openly contact her clansmen there and have them search for the people from the Blood Sect for Nie Tian.

"Alright then. Let's return to Desolate City first." Nie Tian agreed to her plan.

A few days passed...

Nie Tian and Dong Li came to the long and narrow mountain valley where Qi Bailu and the other Tool Sect experts had set up defensive wards to stop the Death Reign.

To avoid attracting attention, Nie Tian hadn't released his Heaven Eyes. However, as soon as they arrived at the mouth of the mountain valley, he detected the aura of numerous lives.

Surprised, Dong Li muttered, "Why are there so many people here?"

Neither she nor Nie Tian knew that Tool Sect experts had set up defenses here to stop the Death Reign, or that Qi Bailu and Zhao Shanling had engaged in fierce battle in this place not long ago.

Gazing at the charred ground in the depths of the valley, as well as the shattered mountain walls on both sides, she suddenly came to a realization. "This place must have just witnessed a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering battle!"

Nie Tian glanced around and came to the same realization.

As soon as they stepped into the mountain valley, clamorous

discussions filled Nie Tian's ears. Numerous Qi warriors and equipment forgers of various origins were discussing or muttering to themselves as they observed the valley after the fierce battle.

“A battle between Soul Realm experts!”

“Zhao Shanling's Death Reign ravaged this land, and the battle between him and the sectmaster of the Tool Sect also took place here not long ago. I hope we can come to some sort of understanding regarding Soul realm experts' profound power from the signs of their battle here.”

“It's hard to believe that the Tool Sect has managed to hold off the Death Reign and find Zhao Shanling within such a short time.”

“I hear that it was that Dong Li from the Dong Clan who found Zhao Shanling's hiding place.”

“That girl is so lucky. By finding Zhao Shanling's hiding place, she has actually helped the Tool Sect avoid an imminent calamity. Meanwhile, she's not a member of the Tool Sect, so the Tool Sect will definitely reward her handsomely when the whole thing is over.”

“I'm afraid that woman is about to become famous throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars.”

“Yeah, no kidding.”

A few Rainbow Lightnings from the Tool Sect were either parked or hovering in the valley. Young Tool Sect members could be seen on them.

Wu Ling was standing on one of them, steering it as he carefully examined the battlefield that had witnessed the fight between Zhao Shanling and Qi Bailu.

At the end of the mountain valley, a few elders of the Tool Sect were standing with grim expressions on their faces. It was hard to say if they were protecting the scene, or on guard for some kind of danger.

Dong Li came to a stop and said to Nie Tian in a low voice, “I bet Zhao Shanling has already left the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. These people are equipment forgers who came to attend the assessment assembly and curious cultivators from Desolate City. They must have received word that Zhao Shanling has left and the crisis has been lifted, so they dared to come here to pay their respects and observe the battlefield where a fierce battle between Soul realm experts took place.”

Nie Tian laughed softly and said, “I see that many of them are talking about you.”

Dong Li, who had already put on another mask, looked rather plain, yet she still looked very tempting as her bright eyes gently blinked. She glanced at Nie Tian in a very charming fashion and said with a smile, “Well, isn’t that all thanks to your meritorious service? You don’t say. It does feel good to be at the center of the stage and have people’s eyes on me. Before, when people talked about me, they barely used any good words. Mostly, they would use words like vicious, venomous, slutty, and sly.”

Her lips curled as her eyes were filled with disdain, as if she hadn’t been affected by those baleful words at all.

“I know you’re not the kind of woman they say you are,” Nie Tian said with a plain tone.

As he spent more and more time with Dong Li, he gradually realized that even though she was fierce and ruthless, she wasn’t exactly slutty. She seemed casual about male-female relationships, yet she actually had her principles.

“Of course I’m not the things they say I am.” It seemed that Dong Li couldn’t care less about how people thought of her. “Most men are jerks. You smile at them, and they think you’re willing to get intimate with them. If they get what they want, they’ll call you loose. If they don’t, they’ll badmouth you and call you degrading things.

“Those men who call me degrading things are the most degrading themselves! Well, they can say whatever they like about me. It’s not like I’ll lose anything or stop living.”

A surprised expression spread across Nie Tian’s face. “I didn’t think you’d be so open-minded about this.”

“Well... people get used to things.” Dong Li chuckled softly. “Also, I got to kill quite a number of jerks like that. I have a full bag of tricks to use on those men. I can fool them like animals. Not only will they not get anything from me, but I’ll make them pay, even with their lives.”

The two of them talked in low voices as they marched deeper into the mountain valley.

All of a sudden, Nie Tian felt a frosty gaze on him from a distant location. He traced it and discovered that it was Pei Qiqi, who was staring at him from afar.

Chapter 469: Embarrassment

In the depths of the valley, Li Ye noticed that Pei Qiqi was staring at a stranger. Confused, he asked, “Anything wrong, senior martial sister? Why are you staring at that man?”

Pei Qiqi had seen Nie Tian wearing the same mask he was wearing now on many occasions, and thus recognized him the moment he entered her sight.

Meanwhile, Li Ye had never seen Nie Tian wearing that mask before, and therefore didn’t understand what was going on.

Before people from the Tool Sect had come to evacuate equipment forgers attending the assessment assembly, Li Ye had successfully forged a premium grade spiritual tool, and was therefore acknowledged by the Tool Sect as a premium grade equipment forger.

Thanks to Zhen Huilan, the two of them had long since learned of Zhao Shanling’s return. After Zhao Shanling had been found and the turmoil in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation came to an end, they had come to the mountain valley in an attempt to broaden their view by observing the place where two powerful Soul realm experts had engaged in battle.

“I can’t believe that bastard is here in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation!” Pei Qiqi cursed in a low voice.

She couldn’t help but grow angry as she looked at the incomparably tempting Dong Li walking closely beside Nie Tian and the way they were talking to each other.

“Who?” Li Ye didn’t understand who she was talking about.

“The bastard with the surname ‘Nie’ of course,” Pei Qiqi reminded him.

Li Ye was instantly enlightened. “That’s Nie Tian you’re staring at?!”

“Who else can it be?” Pei Qiqi said with a cold face. “He travels here and there, being deliberately mysterious. Now, he’s come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. I wonder what he’s after.”

Looking surprised, Li Ye said, “Senior martial sister, that guy seems to be coming from the other end of the valley. All land that lies beyond that side of the valley has been regarded as a forbidden zone by the Tool Sect. Since he’s coming from that direction, does that mean he was wandering in the forbidden zone before the turbulence ended? If that’s the case, it’s quite impressive of him for not being killed by the Death Reign and returning alive.”

Pei Qiqi shook her head. “Mere luck is all that is. Considering his current cultivation base, if he did run into the Death Reign, he would have definitely been killed.”

“You’re right.” Li Ye agreed, and then started laughing. “I’ll go talk to him!”

“Don’t!” Pei Qiqi stopped him with a cold tone. “Now that he’s seen us, if he’s at all respectful, he should come to greet us.”

“Alright.” Li Ye nodded as he took out a bottle of alcohol and started drinking with a smile on his face. “I’ll tell him the good news that not only have I become a premium grade equipment forger acknowledged by the Tool Sect, but I’ve also advanced to the late Greater Heaven stage. Right, I’ll also tell him about your recent breakthrough in cultivation thanks to the enlightenment you’ve derived from the spatial rift in the Realm of Flame Heaven.”

Meanwhile...

Dong Li followed Nie Tian’s gaze and discovered Pei Qiqi, who was staring at them from the depths of the valley. Her lips pursed into a smile as she intentionally pressed herself towards Nie Tian and hooked his arm with hers. Then, with a taunting tone, she asked, “Pei Qiqi recognized you, didn’t she?”

“Yeah, she’s seen me wearing this mask on many occasions,” Nie Tian answered.

“Do you wanna go over?” Dong Li asked, smiling.

“Yeah, of course,” Nie Tian answered without thinking.

“Okay, I’ll go with you.” Looking excited, Dong Li clutched Nie Tian’s arm tightly, stuck out her ample chest slightly, and marched towards Pei Qiqi and Li Ye with her head high.

Nie Tian felt uncomfortable being dragged forward. Confused by her suddenly intimate actions, he asked, “What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” Dong Li said with an innocent and wronged expression. “What? Now that your old lover is here, you don’t want to have anything to do with me, right?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Nie Tian with a bitter face.

Dong Li snorted coldly. “I can tell that your relationship with Pei Qiqi is beyond normal.”

“You’re wrong. My relationship with her is very normal.” A tiresome expression filled Nie Tian’s face. “My relationship with her is just as normal as my relationship with you.”

Dong Li lowered her voice, her watery eyes glittering with charming light. “Oh, you’re wrong. Our relationship is far beyond normal. You touched me and I kissed you. Do you call this normal? Or are you saying that you’ve done the same things with Pei Qiqi? You’ve touched her and she’s kissed you?”

“N-no.” Nie Tian started to feel a headache coming on.

Dong Li’s abnormal behavior made him very uncomfortable, and he did not know why she had started behaving so strangely immediately after seeing Pei Qiqi.

“Good.” Dong Li laughed softly, looking pleased.

The two of them talked as they approached Pei Qiqi and Li Ye. in

the meantime, Nie Tian made numerous attempts to struggle free from Dong Li's hooked arms, yet the harder he tried, the more tightly Dong Li clung to him.

The two of them didn't catch too much attention as they fumbled forward in the mountain valley. After all, their cultivation bases weren't impressive, and Dong Li wasn't very eye-catching after assuming a different appearance.

Moments later, Dong Li practically dragged Nie Tian to Pei Qiqi and Li Ye.

Keh! Keh!

Nie Tian seemed somewhat embarrassed having Dong Li clinging so closely to him. He cleared his throat and said with a wry smile, "Long time no see, Miss Pei. I didn't know you'd also come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. I had actually planned to visit you and Li Ye in Shatter City. It's a happy coincidence that we can meet here in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation..."

Before he could finish, Pei Qiqi interrupted him. Looking suspiciously at Dong Li, who was clinging to him like a little girl clinging to her father, she asked coldly, "Who's she?"

"Who is she, Little Tian?" Dong Li also asked, even though she already knew the answer.

"Little Tian?" Li Ye, who was just about to find fault with Nie Tian, went blank as his eyes widened. His gaze switched back and forth between Nie Tian and Dong Li before finally landing on Nie Tian. Grinning, he said, "I didn't know you had it in you."

Nie Tian felt even more embarrassed.

"I asked who is she?" Pei Qiqi asked again.

"Yeah, who is she, Little Tian?" Dong Li blinked unwittingly with a curious expression on her face, as if she had no idea who Pei Qiqi was.

The four of them stood in the middle of the mountain valley while many others observed the battlefield and engaged in heated discussion around them.

At that moment, Huan Yuan from the Tool Sect pointed at Dong Li from a Rainbow Lightning that was floating in the distant sky as she said to Wu Ling and the others beside her, “Look! It’s that big sister we met not long ago. I can’t believe she’s still alive. I reminded her to be careful on her own before we left.

“I thought she would be dead already. Who could have guessed that she actually returned unscathed.”

Wu Ling and the others were also here to derive enlightenment from the place where powerful Soul realm experts had fought.

After hearing Huang Yuan’s words, they all cast their curious gazes towards Dong Li.

However, none of them paid much attention to Nie Tian, who was standing right beside her. It had been years since Wu Ling had last seen Nie Tian. Both his aura and cultivation base had changed greatly since then, so he failed to recognize him.

Zhu Han’s lustful gaze landed on Pei Qiqi after roaming Dong Li’s body for a few seconds. “Isn’t that Miss Pei?! She’s Master Zhen’s disciple. Don’t tell me that they know each other.”

Back when Wu Ling and the others had discovered Dong Li, he had volunteered to search her to determine if she had been illegally gathering earthflame essence, though Wu Ling had stopped him.

Now that he saw Dong Li again, he was once again aroused. However, since Dong Li looked rather average, his eyes were rapidly seized by Pei Qiqi instead.

Huang Yuan pursed her lips into a smile. “Brother Han, you’re just like a dog that can’t fight its urge to eat shit. (Idiom: people having bad habits that are very hard to change) Miss Pei is Master Zhen’s disciple. Don’t you even think about it.”

Zhu Han didn't seem scared at all. "She is Master Zhen's disciple. So what? I'm from a noble background myself. Are you telling me that I'm not good enough for her?"

"I just don't think you'll be able to land her," Huang Yuan ridiculed him.

Standing on the Rainbow Lightning, Wu Ling's eyes narrowed as he gazed at Dong Li and Pei Qiqi, who seemed to be talking to each other, from afar. With an expressionless face, he said, "Miss Pei has already entered the middle Greater Heaven stage, which is higher than you and me. Meanwhile, she practices the spatial magics she has learned from Master Zhen. Given time, she'll surely grow to be the most skilled spatial energy wielder in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

"Zhu Han, if you can actually make her fall for you, it'll work out great for you and the Tool Sect."

Zhu Han's eyes lit up as he blurted, "So does this mean that I have your support, Big Brother Ling?"

"Sure, I'll support you if you want to pursue her, but don't you dare come up with any crooked ideas," Wu Ling said with an indifferent tone.

Zhu Han let out a cunning laugh. "Hahaha! How would I do anything like that to a true beauty?! Lower the Rainbow Lightning, Big Brother Ling. Let's go over there and say hi."

Huang Yuan frowned. "Won't that be a bit abrupt?"

Wu Ling's gaze swept across the four of them in the valley. He had seen Pei Qiqi and Li Ye before. Both of them had given him deep impressions.

As for Dong Li and Nie Tian, he couldn't care less who they were.

"Well, Master Zhen and my father are old friends. It doesn't hurt to go down there and greet Pei Qiqi and Li Ye." With these words, Wu Ling steered the Rainbow Lightning down towards Nie Tian

and the others.

Chapter 470: Giving No Face

As soon as the Rainbow Lightning came to a stop before Dong Li, Huang Yuan greeted her with a bright smile. “Big sister, we meet again.”

Dong Li seemed to enjoy the sight of her. Smiling, she nodded and said, “Thank you for reminding me before. I found a place to hide and luckily escaped the Death Reign. That was close.”

“Hahaha, you’re welcome,” Huang Yuan said, smiling.

Right before Huang Yuan and the others had descended, Nie Tian had been grilled by Pei Qiqi and Dong Li together, and thus felt a strong headache.

As soon as the Tool Sect youngsters came down from midair on their Rainbow Lightning, Nie Tian sensed them. Therefore, he secretly raised his guard and grew silent.

Pei Qiqi and Li Ye exchanged a glance and also fell silent.

They both knew Wu Ling, and were aware of the fact that Wu Ling had suffered a great loss from Nie Tian during the Heaven Gate trial, and eventually lost his left hand because of it.

Dong Li was also well-aware of the feud between Wu Ling and Nie Tian, and thus stopped messing around.

As soon as Wu Ling and the others landed, they realized that Pei Qiqi, Dong Li, and the others, who were talking just now, had suddenly grown silent.

After a moment of silent pondering, Wu Ling broke the ice by saying, “I heard that you’ve successfully joined the ranks of Premium grade equipment forgers, Junior Martial Brother Li. Congratulations. You’re able to forge Premium grade spiritual tools at such a young age. Your equipment forging talent is simply amazing.”

Li Ye and Pei Qiqi were Zhen Huilan's disciples, while Wu Ling's mother Bai Yu and Zhen Huilan had been martial sisters in the Tool Sect, so he naturally referred to Li Ye as his junior martial brother.

"Hahaha! If I didn't have extraordinary equipment forging talent, my master wouldn't have taken me in as her disciple, right?!" Li Ye wasn't modest at all. "My master once told me that not a single person throughout the Tool Sect's history has ever become a Premium grade equipment forger at my age!"

Wu Ling searched briefly in his head before nodding and saying, "That's actually true."

Zhu Han laughed as he played up to Pei Qiqi by initiating a conversation with her. "Junior Martial Sister Pei, your master used to be an important member of the Tool Sect, so we're actually very close. Now that that traitor Zhao Shanling has fled the Realm of Unbounded Desolation again and the turbulence has come to an end, if you're not in a hurry to leave, I'd be happy to show you around the magnificent sites in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. What do you think?"

"That won't be necessary," Pei Qiqi said indifferently. Then, she turned to Li Ye, who was standing beside her, and said, "Alright, let's go back to Desolate City."

Zhu Han didn't seem to be angered by her rigid attitude, but rather asked warmly, "You're going back to Desolate City? We still have two vacant spots on our Rainbow Lightning. How about we give you a ride?"

"Let me put it this way," Pei Qiqi answered coldly. "I don't want to listen to you and I have no interest in traveling with you. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

The smile on Zhu Han's face froze.

Wu Ling and Huang Yuan beside him were also embarrassed, not

sure what to say to relieve the tension.

Even though Wu Ling had met Pei Qiqi and Li Ye before, they hadn't spent much time together, and he thus wasn't aware of Pei Qiqi's notoriously bad temper.

Nie Tian tried hard not to laugh, as he was no stranger to Pei Qiqi's strange temperament. She was the kind of girl who would never mince her words when facing people who she detested.

Zhu Han had targeted the wrong girl. Nothing good would ever come of him trying to play up to Pei Qiqi. He would only end up upset and frustrated.

"Let's go, Li Ye. There's not much to see here anyways, only annoying flies." Pei Qiqi turned right around and walked off, not sparing Wu Ling and the others a glance.

"See you around, Senior Martial Brother Wu," Li Ye said with a smile before he winked at Nie Tian and trotted after Pei Qiqi.

He could tell that his senior martial sister was already unhappy after seeing Nie Tian and Dong Li together. Coming over at such a bad time, Zhu Han could only blame himself for the poor timing.

Seeing that Pei Qiqi and Li Ye had started marching towards the end of the mountain valley in the direction of the Tool Sect and Desolate City, Nie Tian also moved out.

Since Dong Li had been clinging to his arm the entire time, as soon as he moved, Dong Li followed along. She turned around and bid farewell to Huang Yuan, "I hope I'll see you again, little sister."

She was the daughter of the Dong Clan's clanmaster. The Dong Clan was the most influential power in the Realm of a Hundred Battles, whose reserve strength wasn't any poorer than the Tool Sect's.

Dong Li had been to countless important events and met with countless important people. Hence, she didn't attach much significance to Wu Ling and Zhu Han, and she only bid farewell to

Huang Yuan before she left.

Zhu Han gave a cold harrumph. “A woman too stupid to appreciate my favor!”

Huang Yuan chuckled softly. “I knew this would happen.”

Wu Ling remained silent. Frowning, he watched the four of them walk farther and farther away. Eventually, his gaze landed on Nie Tian.

For some reason, he hadn’t felt anything when Nie Tian had faced him earlier, but now that he had his back toward him, he felt a sense of familiarity, which made him quite uncomfortable.

However, as he thought about it, he didn’t think he had ever met that man before.

Therefore, shaking his head, he decided to let it go.

...

It wasn’t long before Pei Qiqi, Li Ye, and the others came to the end of the mountain valley.

Zhu Lian and a few other Tool Sect elders nodded as they saw Pei Qiqi and Li Ye. Each and every one of them looked very grave.

As for Nie Tian and Dong Li behind them, they just briefly swept across them with their eyes.

Pei Qiqi and Li Ye bowed to them out of respect and walked out of the valley towards Desolate City.

Nie Tian and Dong Li talked in low voices as they followed along.

When they were a significant distance away from the mountain valley, a chuckle escaped Dong Li’s mouth, and she said disdainfully, “That guy from earlier is named Zhu Han. He’s the grandson of the Tool Sect elder we met at the entrance of the valley. He’s such a fool for thinking he can get a girl like Pei Qiqi. He’s like a toad that’s after a swan’s flesh.”

“Zhu Han...” Nie Tian secretly carved the name in his heart.

Disgust filled Dong Li’s eyes as she continued, “I heard that that guy is exactly the kind of jerk I told you about. By relying on the fact that two of his grandfathers are elders of the Tool Sect, he has defiled quite a number of pretty girls in the Tool Sect. Pei Qiqi must have heard about his bad reputation. It didn’t surprise me at all that she adopted such an indifferent attitude towards him.”

A surprised expression spread across Nie Tian’s face. “Two grandfathers?”

“Yeah, Zhu Bin, who we’ve seen twice, and Zhu Lian, who we just passed at the end of the valley,” Dong Li explained. “They’re cousins. They both practice lightning power, and they’re at the same cultivation level. Since Zhu Bin never took a wife, he sees Zhu Han as his own grandson. That’s why Zhu Han is so arrogant and has an extremely messed up personal life.”

With these words, she let out a cold harrumph. “Just like him, many juniors of the Tool Sect don’t know how terrifying Zhao Shanling is. And they’ve no idea that a huge crisis is looming.

“Zhao Shanling must have returned to take the position of sectmaster of the Tool Sect. By the time Xia Yi enters the late Soul realm with the help of the earthflame essence he’s gathered here, he’ll definitely return to Realm of Unbounded Desolation again with Zhao Shanling.

“If it comes down to that, I really can’t think of anyone in the Tool Sect who’ll be able to stop them.

“You saw it yourself that Zhu Lian and the other Tool Sect elders didn’t seem relaxed at all even though Zhao Shanling has left. Clearly, something was still weighing on their minds. That means that, as seniors in the Tool Sect, they know how formidable Zhao Shanling is, and that the crisis is far from over.

“Even Wu Ling didn’t seem very thrilled about their temporary

victory.

“However, there just are fools like Zhu Han who believe the Tool Sect has won a great victory, and are in the mood to hit on Pei Qiqi.”

After hearing her words, Nie Tian nodded, agreeing that Zhu Han was a fool indeed.

The four of them marched farther and farther away from the valley where the battle between Qi Bailu and Zhao Shanling had taken place.

Suddenly, Pei Qiqi and Li Ye, who were marching in the front, came to a stop, as if they were waiting for Nie Tian and Dong Li to catch up.

Upon seeing this, Nie Tian turned to Dong Li and said, “Aren’t you going to the Tool Sect to claim your rewards for finding Zhao Shanling? See if they’ll give you some advanced spiritual tools?”

“There’s no rush for that.” Dong Li sounded composed and unhurried. “Since Grandpa Qin Yi knows that Zhao Shanling was discovered thanks to my help, there’s no escaping that I’ll be rewarded for it. It won’t matter when I go to them. Or I can simply do nothing, and people from the Tool Sect will probably go to the Dong Clan to express their gratitude to my sect.

“Perhaps I’ll benefit even more if I don’t take the initiative to find them. If they do come to my clan, my prestige in my clan will surely experience a great lift. My clan can also take the opportunity to ask the Tool Sect to help us forge some advanced spiritual tools.

“Those who receive those high-level spiritual tools will be grateful to me too, for I’m the reason they’re receiving such treasures.

“And throw in a Fruit of Life. My status in my clan will truly become stable.

“I believe this will fix the damage caused by my previous losses to

you in the Realm of Split Void. I won't need to assume another name and prove myself in horrible places like the Realm of Split Void anymore." Dong Li seemed overjoyed.

Their trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation had brought her both fame and material benefits.

Chapter 471: Master-disciple Reunion

Soon, Nie Tian and Dong Li caught up to Pei Qiqi and Li Ye.

By the time they caught up, Pei Qiqi started marching forward again with an expressionless face.

She didn't try to ask Nie Tian about Dong Li's identity again, but rather walked in silence, as if she didn't even know him.

Seeing her indifferent attitude, Dong Li, who originally wanted to have some fun, felt bored and thus let go of Nie Tian's arm.

Li Ye didn't seem bothered by any of this. Face full of smiles, he bragged on and on about his breakthrough in cultivation and becoming a Premium grade equipment forger.

While listening to him, Nie Tian snuck glances at Pei Qiqi from time to time, and discovered that she didn't seem to want to talk at all.

Nie Tian didn't want to bother her while she was in such a state. Thus, he just chatted randomly with Li Ye, with Dong Li joining the conversation occasionally.

A few days later, the four of them came to a stop by the foot of an enormous volcano where the Tool Sect was located.

When Dong Li had first lead Nie Tian to find suitable volcanoes for his Flame Dragon Armor, Dong Li had intentionally steered clear of the Tool Sect. Therefore, this was the first time he had been to this ancient sect.

Looking up, Nie Tian could see with great clarity that there were numerous stone caves scattered halfway up the magnificent volcano, making it almost look like a beehive.

From time to time, equipment forgers would go into or come out of the stone caves, where they were clearly using the flame power of the volcano to forge spiritual tools.

At the foot of the volcano stood a forest of stone pavilions that were dozens of meters high. Many Tool Sect members seemed to be bustling amongst them.

After coming to the Tool Sect's giant front gate, which was made of stone, Pei Qiqi took out a Sound Stone and whispered something into it. Then, she turned around, and her cold gaze found Nie Tian.

Confusion appeared on Nie Tian's face.

"Li Ye and I are going back to Desolate City. You wait here. Someone you know is coming here to meet you." With these words, she turned right around and left for Desolate City.

"Remember to come and find me in Desolate City at the place I told you about after you're finished here," Li Ye said waving his hand.

Watching the two of them leave, Nie Tian wondered why Pei Qiqi told him to wait here.

Standing in front of the Tool Sect's front gate, Dong Li said, "Outsiders can't possibly get into the Tool Sect, especially at such a sensitive time. If I state my identity, they'll probably let us in and throw us a grand reception, yet I don't wanna do that."

Nie Tian examined the magnificent stone gate as he pondered Pei Qiqi's intentions.

Moments later, two people came out through the stone gate.

A strong shudder ran through Nie Tian as soon as he saw them.

Wu Ji, who had received Pei Qiqi's message, walked through the stone gate. Facing an unfamiliar young man and woman, he asked with his warm voice, "My friends, did you see a blue-robed young woman?"

Also confused, Fang Hui, who came out with him, muttered, "We came as soon as we received the kid's message. Why is she not here?"

Nie Tian realized why Pei Qiqi had told him to wait here the moment he saw Wu Ji.

Eyes reddened, he looked blankly at the thin old man before him, at a loss for words.

Even though Dong Li had never met Wu Ji, from Nie Tian's subtle expression, she sensed what was happening. Therefore, she said in a low voice, "I'll return to Desolate City now. My clan has a residence there. Come and find me when you're finished, but don't you dare go missing on me again."

With these words, she sensibly left in the direction Pei Qiqi and Li Ye had left in.

After she was gone, Nie Tian took a deep breath and said, "Master."

Wu Ji's eyes lit up as he suddenly realized the identity of the unfamiliar-looking young man before him. Immediately afterwards, he whispered, "Don't talk. We'll find another place."

Fang Hui was also astonished.

Neither Wu Ji or he had thought the young man before them would be Nie Tian, who had gone missing for quite some time.

He had heard about Nie Tian's trip to the Realm of a Hundred Battles and his secret deal with the Dong Clan, which had allowed Nie Donghai and the other Cloudsoaring Sect members to return to the Realm of Flame Heaven safely.

However, he had no idea where he had gone to afterwards.

Later, Wu Ji had learned from Hua Mu that Nie Tian had gone on an exploration trip to a Phantasm relic in the Realm of Dark Underworld with Dong Li, and eventually disappeared along with the Spirit Pearl.

Just a few days ago, Hua Mu had asked him if Nie Tian had appeared.

Wu Ji quickly calmed down and started walking away from the Tool Sect, expressionless. “Come with me.”

When the three of them were far enough from the Tool Sect, he grabbed Nie Tian by the shoulder and shot up into the sky. Relying on his Profound realm abilities, he sped away through the air.

Fang Hui followed along.

A quarter hour later, Wu Ji came to a stop at the foot of a mountain that was hundreds of kilometers away from the Tool Sect, and stood in the shade of the mountain.

Just as Nie Tian was about to speak, Wu Ji waved at him. He contacted someone with his Sound Stone and formed a ward to isolate their voices from the outside world. Only then did he finally let out a sigh of relief and say, “You know Pei Qiqi, right?”

Nie Tian nodded.

Wu Ji smiled. “She’s a good girl. I was guarding Fang Hui while he forged a Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tool for the assessment assembly. That was when she sought me out and told me that Zhao Shanling had returned to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. She also told me that his Death Reign was floating directly towards the Tool Sect.

“The volcano Fang Hui was using to forge his Spirit Channeling grade spiritual tool stood right on the Death Reign’s path. I took her advice and told Fang Hui to end his equipment forging process in order to save those rare spiritual materials for next time.

“That was before the Tool Sect confirmed the news of Zhao Shanling’s return.

“Fang Hui made a quick decision to end his equipment forging process, and the two of us evacuated from that volcano as quickly as possible. As we expected, soon, the Tool Sect realized that they seemed to be unable to stop the Death Reign, and thus told everyone the truth about Zhao Shanling’s return.

“Being informed just a few days late, the other renowned equipment forgers, who had hoped to join the ranks of Spirit Channeling grade equipment forgers just like Fang Hui, lost almost all of the valuable spiritual materials they had spent decades to gather.

“Because we were informed in time, Fang Hui lost only thirty percent of his materials, thus preserving his chance of coming back to attend the next assessment assembly.”

Nie Tian was shocked after hearing these words.

He had never thought that Pei Qiqi would have done him such a huge favor and kept silent about it. Thanks to her, Wu Ji had been able to make plans beforehand and escape danger.

“How did she know that you were guarding Senior Fang?” Nie Tian asked, confused.

Just as Wu Ji was about to explain, his eyebrows rose. Smiling, he said, “He’s here.”

A streak of glorious light sailed through the sky like a falling star and stopped before them.

As the light gradually faded away, a man appeared from within. Wu Ji created an opening in his ward, and the man walked in.

“You told that girl to inform me, right?” Wu Ji asked the man.

Hua Mu nodded, smiling.

“Mr. Hua!” Nie Tian bowed respectfully.

Hua Mu’s gaze switched back and forth between Nie Tian and Wu Ji before he turned to Fang Hui and said, “If you don’t mind, I have something to say to them.”

Sensible, Fang Hui clasped his hands towards him and walked out of the ward.

“Fang Hui and I are sworn friends,” Wu Ji said.

Hua Mu nodded gently. “I know that. But this is regarding Nie Tian. You and I are the only ones who know about his special bloodline. What I’m about to tell him is too important, and had best stay a secret. Also, considering the unfavorable situation he’s in, we need to do our best to protect his secrets. The less others know about him, the better.”

After a moment of silent pondering, Wu Ji nodded, taking his point.

“Nie Tian!” Hua Mu exclaimed softly. “From now on, you’ll need to be even more discreet, and you shouldn’t use the Flame Dragon Armor again anytime soon!”

Nie Tian was confused. “Why?”

Wu Ji sighed. “The Flame Dragon Armor was originally from the Flame God Sect. After collecting enough earthflame essence, Xia Yi, the Flame God, will definitely attempt to break through into the late Soul realm. It won’t be a problem for us if he fails. But if he succeeds and enters the late Soul realm, no one in the Domain of the Falling Stars will be able to overtake him in battle.

“Originally, the Heaven Palace Sect could have sheltered you, but that chance was lost when you refused to join the Heaven Palace Sect.

“Once Xia Yi advances to the late Soul realm, that patriarch in the Heaven Palace Sect will only be able to match his strength equally. Under such circumstances, even if you changed your mind and joined the Heaven Palace Sect, I doubt that they would ruin their relationship with Xia Yi just to let you keep the Flame Dragon Armor.”

Nie Tian immediately realized what a dangerous situation he was in.

“By the way, why did you refuse to join the Heaven Palace Sect?” Hua Mu asked, confused.

Nie Tian had nothing to hide when facing Hua Mu and Wu Ji. Therefore, he brought out the truth, “The Heaven Palace Sect made a deal with the Demon outsiders, trading something the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace sealed away in their realm for the precious materials that late Soul realm expert needs to break through into the Void domain. Those materials seem to only exist in the Demons’ realms.”

Hua Mu gasped with astonishment. “You witnessed all that?!”

Nie Tian smiled bitterly. “I kind of had to, since I was there to seal that spatial rift when they made the deal. Those people from the Heaven Palace Sect needed me to stop the Demons’ army from invading through the spatial rift, so they couldn’t keep me from learning the truth.”

Suddenly enlightened, Hua Mu said, “Now I finally get why the Heaven Palace Sect demanded you so strongly from the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect afterwards. They weren’t just after your fragmentary star marks.” Then, Hua Mu took a deep look at him and sighed. “Even though you’re blessed with many incredible opportunities, the burden on your shoulders is also unmatched.”

Wu Ji’s eyebrows knit together. “If that’s the case, the Heaven Palace Sect surely won’t give up before they get you. They’re only exercising patience right now because of the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect’s firm stance on this matter. If the deal you talked about works out, and that patriarch in the Heaven Palace Sect enters the Void domain after getting those spiritual materials he needs, he probably won’t care about the Yin Sect and the Yang Sect’s stance anymore.”

Hua Mu smiled bitterly. “Meanwhile, Xia Yi won’t give up on retaking the Flame Dragon Armor. After entering the late Soul realm, he’ll probably help Zhao Shanling take the position of the Tool Sect’s sectmaster first. But once he learns about your whereabouts, he’ll spare no cost to get you.”

Wu Ji and Hua Mu's analysis of his situation made Nie Tian's hair stand on end and gave him a bad headache.

With a frustrated and helpless expression, Hua Mu said, "It's a pity that I don't have much time left. If I had another hundred years, perhaps I'd be able to make another breakthrough in my cultivation and help you in some way."

Wu Ji chimed in. "Yeah. If I had more time, I'd have a chance to advance to the Soul realm and perhaps provide you with some help."

"Another hundred years?" Nie Tian grinned. "Master, Mr. Hua, I obtained something during this trip to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation by accident. I think it'll help you solve your lifespan crisis temporarily."

Hua Mu sighed deeply. "Nothing but Fruits of Life can give us additional years."

Without saying another word, Nie Tian took out two wooden boxes from within his bracelet of holding. He handed one to each of them and said with a bright smile, "They happen to be Fruits of Life."

Chapter 472: A Secret Talk

Hua Mu and Wu Ji stared at the wooden boxes, flabbergasted.

For thousands of years, countless people, bothered by their draining lifespan, had come to roam the barren land of the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, hoping to find the promised land where wood power was as thick as water, and secure a Fruit of Life.

However, the promised land and Fruits of Life were just a legend that no one had ever actually experienced.

Hua Mu had also heard about that legend, and thus had come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to try his luck.

Before Zhao Shanling and the Death Reign had returned, he had conducted a thorough search of the entire Realm of Unbounded Desolation, but hadn't found a single clue.

Afterwards, he had paid Wu Ji a visit, placing his last hope in Nie Tian, since he had a feeling that he might be able to come to some miraculous discoveries.

Even so, he had realized that this might just have been his wishful thinking, and thus hadn't held high hopes.

He had never imagined that the next time he met Nie Tian, he would present to him a Fruit of Life.

Staring at the wooden box, Wu Ji couldn't even get out a whole sentence. "N-Nie Tian... Are you saying that there is a Fruit of Life in this box? Are you sure that you're not mistaken?"

Hua Mu received the wooden box with a slightly trembling hand, and with great caution, he slowly opened its lid.

An intense aura of life immediately poured out through the cracked open lid.

He swiftly closed the lid. Eyes shining with excitement, he exclaimed, "Such an intense aura of life. There should be no

mistake. This must be a Fruit of Life!”

In the next moment, the wooden box disappeared into his ring of holding.

Since Hua Mu had confirmed that there was indeed a Fruit of Life inside, Wu Ji no longer felt the need to examine the box in his hand, and thus quickly put it away. With a somewhat urgent tone, he said, “I’ll refine this Fruit of Life and break the current limit of my lifespan as soon as I return to the Realm of Flame Heaven!”

Hua Mu took a deep breath, attempting to calm himself. “How did you get these Fruits of Life?”

Even he found it hard to restore calm to his mind after suddenly obtaining the treasure of his dreams.

Both Wu Ji and Hua Mu had initially noticed Nie Tian because of his uniqueness, hoping that one day he might be able to somehow extend their lifespan with his unique bloodline.

However, they knew that in order for that to happen, Nie Tian would have to achieve significant breakthroughs in the cultivation of his bloodline.

Right now, Nie Tian had spent far from enough time nourishing and cultivating his bloodline. Hence, it was almost impossible for him to extend their lifespan before their time ran out.

They had never expected that Nie Tian could find another path when his bloodline wasn’t advanced enough, and obtain Fruits of Life for them.

The Fruits of Life would eliminate their worries about their dwindling lifespan. With the extra years they would get from them, they would be able to practice cultivation at a pace they were comfortable with, and achieve another breakthrough in their cultivation, thus acquiring even more years.

“I got them in a magical place I entered through an entrance that was constantly floating about in the Realm of Unbounded

Desolation...” Nie Tian went on and explained everything to them in detail, including how he had found the entrance with the help of his bloodline, and how he had entered that magical place and eventually secured those Fruits of Life.

He knew that he didn’t need to withhold anything from the two men before him.

After hearing Nie Tian’s explanation, both Hua Mu and Wu Ji were deeply amazed. They exchanged a look, and Hua Mu said, “That place sounds like a unique dimension. I wonder if it formed naturally or developed from some powerful being. The titan in the earth is probably the guardian of that ancient Tree of Life, and it’s still alive...”

“A magical dimension... a titan... a Tree of Life...” Thoughts flashed across Wu Ji’s mind.

Hua Mu’s expression flickered as he said, “Oh, right. I heard that you were chased away by something from the Phantasms before you disappeared along with it. What happened?”

“The thing that chased after me is called a Spirit Pearl. It was the heart of an ancient starship of the Phantasms’.” With these words, Nie Tian took the Spirit Pearl out from within his bracelet of holding. Handing it to Hua Mu, he said, “This is it.”

After receiving it from Nie Tian, Hua Mu’s fingertips started to flicker with bright auras, as if he had instantly started examining it. “How did you know it’s called a Spirit Pearl?”

“I learned about it from one of the fragmentary star marks,” Nie Tian explained.

“It contains wisps of discarnate souls and some kind of profound patterns formed by strings, which seemed to be created by the Phantasms. I still can’t perceive the mysteries within them.” After a brief examination, Hua Mu handed the Spirit Pearl to Wu Ji and added, “I know that you have deep understandings regarding the

outsider races' languages, bloodlines, and incantations. Why don't you take a look at it?"

Wu Ji took the Spirit Pearl, sat down on the ground, and started examining it with his eyes narrowed.

Beside him, Hua Mu turned to Nie Tian and said in a low voice, "Your master's cultivation base isn't among the top in the Domain of the Falling Stars, but he's an extremely learned scholar. He's got a unique perception of many ancient matters. Even the Spirit Condor has limited knowledge regarding the outsiders' languages and bloodlines, yet your master has a thorough understanding of them."

Nie Tian smiled. "I kind of sensed it."

Many years ago, when he had first been to the back of Cloudsoaring Mountain to learn from Wu Ji, Wu Ji hadn't taught him any profound incantations or magics, like normal masters would have done.

Instead, he had lectured him about the history of ancient Qi warriors, the complicated languages that outsider races used, and his understanding of spiritual power, psychic power, souls and bloodlines.

Even though Wu Ji hadn't taught him many specific magics, he had explained the profundity of cultivation bases and the creeds of cultivation very thoroughly.

With a very serious expression, Hua Mu said, "The fact that you've made so many achievements in your life so far has a great deal to do with your master. You must have benefited greatly from the things he taught you. It's just that you may not realize it yet. Anyone can teach you battle incantations or techniques. However, very few can learn the things your master has taught you.

"As your cultivation base continues to rise, you'll gradually come to realize how precious those things truly are.

“That knowledge and profound understanding are the foundations of an brilliant Qi warrior, the skeleton and veins of all other cultivating matters.”

At that moment, Wu Ji’s eyes suddenly snapped open as he exclaimed, “The soul strings in this Spirit Pearl seem to be forming some unique marks only the Phantasms would use. But there are too many of them. I can’t decode them all within such a short period of time. One thing I can be sure of is that the part I managed to decipher just now contained a star map.”

“A star map?!” Hua Mu exclaimed, overjoyed. “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Wu Ji said with great certainty. “But right now, I can only tell that the Domain of the Falling Stars is on this star map. It’ll take some time to translate the whole star map to the form we understand.”

“If that’s really a star map, I hope you can translate it as soon as you can, for it will be of great significance to the entire Domain of the Falling Stars!” Hua Mu implored solemnly.

“It’ll take at least six months for me to finish it,” Wu Ji said.

“That’s fine. We can wait. We can afford such a luxury now.” After a moment of silence, Hua Mu turned to Nie Tian and said, “Let your master keep that Spirit Pearl for a while, so that he’ll be able to solve the mysteries within it. Perhaps he’ll be able to learn why the Phantasms have returned to the Domain of the Falling Stars or even the location where that ancient starship is berthed in the starry river now.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Alright.”

“Mr. Wu, I think you can return to the Realm of Flame Heaven now,” Hua Mu suggested. “I’ll stay and make arrangements for Nie Tian. What do you think?”

Wu Ji rose to his feet, took out a book from his inner pocket, and handed it to Nie Tian, saying, “Okay, I trust that you’ll keep Nie

Tian away from danger. Here's something I've put together for you. Take a look at them when you have the time. There aren't any incantations or magics in there, only my humble understanding of spiritual power, bloodline power, and soul power. I hope you'll find them helpful."

After receiving the book with both hands, Nie Tian wished to speak, but stopped on second thought. "Master..."

Wu Ji smiled heartily as he patted him on the shoulder and said, "I need to spend some time refining that Fruit of Life and decoding the mysteries within that Spirit Pearl. You can't stay by my side, for you might get exposed and draw attention from the Heaven Palace Sect and the Flame God Sect. We'll have plenty of time together in the future. No need to worry about me."

With these words, he took a deep look at Nie Tian and walked out of the isolation ward.

"Oh, right. Why did you come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation all of a sudden?" Hua Mu asked, curious.

"The Flame Dragon Armor has consumed a tremendous amount of flame power," Nie Tian explained. "I've come to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation because I wanted to recharge it with the earthflame essence in the numerous volcanoes here."

Hua Mu nodded and said, "Oh, so that's how it is. So have you collected the earthflame essence the Flame Dragon Armor needs?"

"Just a little bit, far from enough," Nie Tian answered.

After a moment of pondering, Hua Mu said, "Well, earthflame essence doesn't only exist in the volcanoes in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. Now that Xia Yi has stolen so much earthflame essence from them, the Tool Sect will surely keep a close watch on their volcanoes. It's going to be impossible for you to gather earthflame essence here. But perhaps there's another place where you can do that..."

Surprised by Hua Mu's words, Nie Tian asked, "Didn't you say that I shouldn't use the Flame Dragon Armor again for a while?"

"I didn't say that other place is in the Domain of the Falling Stars," Hua Mu said with a mysterious smile. "The Spirit Condor has a long history and profound reserve power. We're the most successful in the exploration of spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. Even the Tool Sect purchased all of their fiery dimensions through the Spirit Condor."

"In recent years, Xia Yi has made consistent attempts to find spatial rifts that lead to fiery dimensions in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. However, limited by his sect's resources, he hasn't found a single spatial rift that's useful. Therefore, he could only stretch his claws to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation."

After a pause, he added, "I'll go and make some arrangements for you. You just sit tight and hide in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation for a little longer. I'll contact you when I'm done."

"Alright."

Chapter 473: A Learned Scholar

Hua Mu took Nie Tian to a main road that led to Desolate City, gave him a Sound Stone, and left.

Hua Mu told him that the Sound Stone he gave him was very advanced and special. It was a Sound Stone forged by Zhen Huilan, which would allow them to communicate from any location in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation.

The conversation between Nie Tian, Hua Mu, and Wu Ji actually didn't last very long. If he wanted to catch up to Dong Li or Pei Qiqi, he might be able to.

However, he didn't.

Where he was standing was surrounded by numerous volcanoes, and about five days' walk from Desolate City.

He could see many Qi warriors who were hastening toward the mountain valley where the battle between Qi Bailu and Zhao Shanling had taken place, as well as equipment forgers who were heading back toward Desolate City.

He took his time as he marched towards Desolate City. Every once in a while, he would take out the book Wu Ji had given him and read a few pages.

It wasn't a thick book, but it carried Wu Ji's whole life's understanding of ancient Qi warriors, outsiders, and modern Qi warriors, as well as soul power, bloodline power, and spiritual power.

After arriving at the foot of a volcano, Nie Tian saw that there wasn't anyone around, and thus started reading that book again.

According to Wu Ji, humans were the weakest among all the intelligent races.

Humans would have to pass their various incantations and

magics to their disciples or children through dictation or written form.

A number of extremely powerful experts had died before they had a chance to record or impart their lifetime of wisdom and knowledge to their disciples. Many exquisite magics and incantations had been lost like this.

However, outsiders that carried powerful bloodlines wouldn't need to worry about that.

Outsiders could imprint their knowledge and wisdom on their bloodlines so their descendants would naturally inherit them.

The younger generations of powerful bloodlines would be able to receive their ancestors' profound knowledge and understanding of their bloodline power through the transcendence or enhancement of their own bloodlines.

This was only Wu Ji's theory, which he had derived from a lifetime of learning. However, as a person who actually possessed such a special bloodline, Nie Tian's personal experience had proven his theory correct.

In fact, Nie Tian didn't know much about his mysterious bloodline. He had only awakened his three bloodline talents and imprinted them in the depths of his soul through achieving a natural transcendence of his bloodline.

He believed that as his bloodline continued to transcend, he would get to learn more and more about the profound truths of life power from his unique bloodline.

This method of inheritance, which was through no language or symbols, but rather the passing on of bloodlines, was indeed unfathomable.

He also learned from the book Wu Ji had given him that humans had only developed the whole cultivation system of absorbing and drawing power from the spiritual Qi with their spiritual seas

because humans were born with feeble bodies and bloodlines.

Humans' spiritual seas were their source of power. They would need spiritual power to activate all sorts of incantations or arts.

As for outsiders, their hearts were their source of power. They could use their hearts to summon strength and disperse it into their flesh and blood.

Their hearts served similar functions as humans' spiritual seas.

Their blood carried copious amount of blood Qi, which was similar to the spiritual power that circulated in humans through their meridians. Therefore, it was just the energy of heaven and earth in another form.

In the book, Wu Ji had specifically noted that, in light of Nie Tian's uniqueness, he needed to refine his body as well as his blood.

The book also contained Wu Ji's numerous conjectures, which he could not be completely sure of. Therefore, he had urged Nie Tian to make his own judgment according to his personal experiences.

Normally, it would only take him five days to walk back to Desolate City, yet it took him eight days.

During that time, he read the book Wu Ji had given him three times and then burned it to ashes.

Thanks to that book, many cultivation matters he hadn't grasped or understood before gradually became clearer.

He found the part about outsiders and their bloodlines especially helpful. Wu Ji's thorough explanation had confirmed many of his own speculations, as well as given him new ideas.

Looking down at the ashes on the ground, Nie Tian recalled some of the profound contents of the book, and inwardly marveled at Wu Ji's wisdom.

Instead of a Qi warrior, perhaps it would be more accurate to

refer to his master as a scholar of the studies of outsiders, humans, bloodlines, spiritual power, and souls.

He couldn't understand how his master had come to know so much. After all, the outsiders had left the Domain of the Falling Stars thousands of years ago. Where could he have obtained all this knowledge?

He had mastered all of the outsiders' languages, had a deep understandings of outsiders' bloodlines, and came to unique perceptions of humans' and outsiders' cultivation systems.

Furthermore, that book was just the tip of the iceberg. There must be much more valuable knowledge in Wu Jing's mind that he hadn't put in that book.

Nie Tian even had a feeling that the only reason why his master had been afflicted with his insufficient lifespan problem and failed to advance to the Soul realm was because he had poured too much time and energy into the studies of those fields, instead of his own cultivation.

Hua Mu's cultivation base was clearly much higher than his, yet deep respect could be sensed from Hua Mu's expressions and language when facing him.

Hua Mu had even referred to him as an 'extremely learned scholar', and said that he was the best master that had ever lived.

Nie Tian had heard that Wu Ji had taken in two disciples before him, both of whom had turned out to be extraordinary and stepped out of the Realm of Flame Heaven at young ages. Many said they had surpassed Wu Ji.

Standing in front of Desolate City, Nie Tian sighed over Wu Ji's choice. "My master is indeed awe-inspiring. If he had focused solely on his cultivation, it would be hard to imagine what kind of achievements he would have made by now." He didn't quite understand why Wu Ji was so infatuated with those matters.

He realized that, unlike the prosperity he had seen when he first came to Desolate City, the current Desolate City was roamed by very few people.

According to the directions Li Ye had given him before, he quickly followed the lonesome streets to his destination. He came to a stop in front of a stone pavilion and knocked on the gate.

Seconds later, the gate split open, and Li Ye's chubby face stuck out through it. Seeing Nie Tian, he asked, "What took you so long?"

After Li Ye ushered him in, Nie Tian looked up and saw Pei Qiqi standing by the handrails on the second floor. She shot a glance down at him and asked coldly, "Met your master, did you?"

"Thank you for informing him of the situation so early," Nie Tian said sincerely.

"I just did as Mr. Hua told me," Pei Qiqi said with an expressionless face. "Who was that woman you were with? How come she didn't come back with you?"

Nie Tian gave a dry laugh. "We split up. I ran into her while I was roaming the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, so we decided to travel together to keep each other safe. We're actually not very close."

The last thing he wanted was to reveal Dong Li's identity to her.

Dong Li had assumed the name Song Li and done many notoriously bad things in the Realm of Split Void.

If he told Pei Qiqi and Li Ye that Dong Li was Song Li, he was afraid that the two of them would scold him harshly for not being able to tell good from bad and judge him for hanging out with such a vicious woman.

Li Ye's face was full of dirty smiles as he said, "That woman had plain looks, but a steaming body." With these words, he took out a jar of alcohol and waved at Nie Tian. "Come on, since we don't

have any urgent business, drink with me and celebrate my becoming a certified Premium grade equipment forger.

As he spoke, he filled the empty table before him with plates of meat and fruits.

After his previous experience with Dong Baijie, Nie Tian was no longer against drinking. He sat down and started gulping the alcohol down with Li Ye.

As the two of them chatted, they rapidly emptied that jar of alcohol.

At first, Pei Qiqi stood by the handrails, watching them drink and chat. It seemed that she didn't want to go back to her room.

However, shortly afterwards, she walked down the stairs, sat down by the table, and reached out her hand, gesturing for Li Ye to give her a wine cup.

Even though Li Ye was already tipsy and his face was all red, he still had a rather clear mind. Shocked, he asked, "D-do you want a drink, senior martial sister?"

"You have a problem with that?" Pei Qiqi asked.

"No, not at all." Puzzled, Li Ye poured a cup of alcohol for Pei Qiqi.

She drank in sips as she occasionally twisted fruits off the fruit bunches. She didn't speak, but only listened as Nie Tian and Li Ye chatted.

"Where have you been lately?" Li Ye asked as he gulped down another cup of alcohol. "Did you go straight from the Realm of a Thousand Devastations to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?"

"No, I took a few trips to the Realm of a Hundred Battles and Realm of Dark Underworld before ending up in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation." Nie Tian was intentionally vague about his answer. "What about you? What have you done lately?"

“I mostly spent my time gathering materials for the Tool Sect’s assessment assembly,” Li Ye said. “Senior martial sister went to the Realm of Flame Heaven with you and spent six months there. As soon as she returned, she started a period of secluded cultivation. And she entered the middle Greater Heaven stage afterward.”

“Congratulations,” Nie Tian said, looking at Pei Qiqi.

Pei Qiqi’s cheeks were slightly reddened from the alcohol, which seemed to have washed off her coldness to a great extent. “The fact that I was able to make that breakthrough had a great deal to do with the spatial rift in the Realm of Flame Heaven. By the way, you still have quite a few contribution points left with the Blood Skull. You can trade them for spirit stones or cultivation materials if you’d like.”

Li Ye chimed in. “Yeah, take some time to visit Shatter City. You can’t let the Blood Skull get away with all those contribution points. You accumulated quite a few by killing those Dark Moon members and Hunters. Don’t you let them go to waste. They’re still quite valuable. Oh, right. Cai Yuan found me before I came here. He also asked me about your whereabouts.”

Nie Tian nodded. “I might actually return to Shatter City soon.”

“You’ve got some business to attend to?” Li Ye asked.

“Nah, Uncle Hua’s arrangements.” After a moment of hesitation, Nie Tian added, “As you know, I have the Flame Dragon Armor in my possession. It needs earthflame essence. I actually came to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to gather earthflame essence, but my plan didn’t work out. Uncle Hua plans to find a spatial rift in the Void Illusion Mountain Range that leads to a fiery dimension.”

“The Void Illusion Mountain Range again?!” Li Ye exclaimed. “The situation over there has become quite complicated recently. I don’t know if it has something to do with the appearance of those Phantasms, but people have recently discovered a few fairly stable

spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. Some people went in and came back with great fortunes.

“Because of this, the Dark Moon, the Wild Fire, and the Blood Skull have all sent powerful experts to the Void Illusion Mountain Range. Battles broke out on a daily basis.

“Apparently, even experts from other realms have also received word, and thus descended upon the Void Illusion Mountain Range.”

Pei Qiqi jumped in and said, “Plus, it’s said that those spatial rifts have something to do with the disappeared Void Palace sect.”

Nie Tian was taken aback. “Void Palace sect?!”

Chapter 474: Hidden Crisis

The Void Palace Sect, which had formerly been based in the Realm of Split Void, used to be the most powerful Qi warrior sect throughout the Domain of the Falling Stars. It had ridden over the Heaven Palace Sect up until it had vanished.

Back in the day, the Void Palace Sect had discovered a spatial rift that led to a brand-new dimension filled with incomparably rich spiritual Qi in the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

Eager to explore that dimension, the Void Palace Sect had sent out all of their powerful experts. However, not a single one of them ever returned.

Afterwards, that spatial rift had mysteriously disappeared, and no one had ever seen it again.

Soon after that incident, all sorts of Qi that was harmful to human cultivators had started to disperse through some of the spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, contaminating the entire Realm of Split Void. Eventually, the Realm of Split Void was removed from the Domain of the Falling Stars.

That was when the Heaven Palace Sect had risen to become the most powerful sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

Nie Tian was taken aback after hearing that what was happening in the Void Illusion Mountain Range might have something to do with the vanished Void Palace Sect.

Meanwhile, after mentioning the Void Palace Sect, Pei Qiqi, who had originally been sipping her alcohol, seemed to suddenly grow upset, and started chugging her drinks.

She didn't talk anymore, and her picturesque brows seemed to become clouded by deep sorrow.

Nie Tian recalled that she had behaved exactly the same the last time she had mentioned the Void Palace Sect.

“Can it be that she has some sort of connection with the Void Palace Sect, which used to be the overlord of the Domain of the Falling Stars?” Nie Tian thought to himself. Then, he turned to Li Ye and asked, “Who has noticed those spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?”

Li Ye looked rather drunk as he said, “For now, just the Tool Sect, some forces from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, and my master. My master said that many members of the Void Palace Sect were experts of spatial magics. They even had a Spirit Channeling grade spatial energy spiritual tool.

“My master wants to find out what happened to the Void Palace Sect, where they are, and how they’re doing.

“The Tool Sect wants to see if they can find that spatial energy spiritual tool, so that they can use it to fight Zhao Shanling.”

After a short pause, Li Ye gulped down another mouthful of alcohol and said, “It’s also said that there might be precious treasures which don’t exist in the Domain of the Falling Stars on the other side of those spatial rifts. And those precious treasures will be very helpful for Soul realm experts to advance to the Void domain.

“I don’t know if that’s true or not. However, once word of it spreads, powerful experts from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars will soon learn of it.

“It won’t be long before the Void Illusion Mountain Range comes to the center of the stage and attracts powerful experts from everywhere.

“The reason why the Dark Moon, the Wild Fire, and the Blood Skull have sent all of their powerful experts to the Void Illusion Mountain Range is that they all wish to gain control of those spatial rifts so that they’ll be able to negotiate terms with foreign experts in the future.”

Nie Tian gasped with astonishment.

He still remembered that the Heaven Palace Sect had even degenerated to the point where they had proposed a deal with the Demons just to secure the precious materials their late Soul realm experts needed to break through into the Void domain.

If it was true that precious treasures that would help Soul realm experts advance to the Void domain did exist on the other side of those spatial rifts, all the major sects in the Domain of the Falling Stars would rush into action as soon as they learned of them.

If that happened, the Void Illusion Mountain Range would surely turn into a slaughterhouse where cultivators from different powers spilled each others' blood.

While he processed the overwhelming information, in the Dong Clan's property in Desolate City, Dong Mingxuan rushed over from the Realm of a Hundred Battles to see Dong Li,.

In the stone pavilion, Dong Li was surprised by the sight of Dong Mingxuan, Dong Baijie, and many seniors of her clan. "How come so many of you are here?"

From behind the crowd walked a magnificent old man.

With a bushy beard and no shoes, the old man was only of regular height. However, his hands and feet were exceptionally large, and his back and shoulders were broad like a mountain.

After seeing the old man making his way to the front of the crowd, Dong Li was even more confused and surprised. "You're here too, grandpa?!"

The old man's name was Dong Tuodi, a late Profound realm expert who practiced earth power. He was martial brothers with the patriarch of the Dong Clan who practiced secluded cultivation year-round.

Dong Tuodi laughed broadly. "Kiddo, I heard that you helped them find Zhao Shanling. Well done!"

Upon hearing his praise, Dong Li's face was full of smiles as she said humbly, "Yeah, with a bit of luck."

"Still, luck should be considered a part of one's strength." With these words, Dong Tuodi narrowed his eyes and said, "I can take advantage of this opportunity to talk to the Tool Sect about forging spiritual tools for our clan. Also, I can purchase a few Rainbow Lightnings from them. One of them will be yours."

Dong Li hastily bowed to express her gratitude.

"All that said, you should know that I've come to Desolate City because there's something I need to tell you too," Dong Tuodi said.

"What is it?" Dong Li asked with a confused expression.

With a solemn expression, Dong Tuodi said, "You used to take the name Song Li and make your living in the Realm of Split Void for a few years. You must know the Void Illusion Mountain Range very well. You haven't returned to our clan lately, so you probably don't know what has happened in the Void Illusion Mountain Range."

"What happened exactly?"

"A few spatial rifts appeared in the Void Illusion Mountain Range." Dong Tuodi said. "Now, they've stabilized. People have gone into them and returned alive. Some say that the sudden appearance of those spatial rifts might have something to do with the few Phantasms that popped up out of nowhere earlier."

Upon hearing him mention Phantasms, Dong Li's expression flickered slightly, worrying that he would ask her about the Spirit Pearl.

However, he didn't. Instead, he said, "Many who made it back from the other side of those spatial rifts returned with great fortune. Word came from your subordinate Han Mu and other informants that there might be precious treasures that could help Soul realm experts advance to the Void domain in the dimensions

behind those spatial rifts. Also, they might have something to do with the vanished Void Palace Sect.”

Dong Li’s watery eyes lit up.

“As soon as I’m finished here, I’ll head off to the Realm of Split Void, where I’ll make arrangements and wait for the arrival of our powerful experts. They’re regrouping, and soon will descend upon the Void Illusion Mountain Range.” Dong Tuodi’s expression grew stately. “No matter whether it’s regarding the vanished Void Palace Sect or precious materials, our clan needs to get to the bottom of it! Most importantly, we need to act before word of it spreads!”

“I’ll go with you this time, little sister,” Dong Baijie said, smiling.

Dong Li nodded gently and said, “I see.”

...

In the gloomy starry river out of the Domain of the Falling Stars berthed a Phantasms’ ancient starship.

In the mysterious inter-realm space, devastating storms and explosions would take place here and there. Streaks of blinding light that could annihilate realms along with all lives on them would dash by from time to time.

Dialo and a few other Phantasms had been waiting in their ancient starship for quite some time now.

The Spirit Pearl should have long since returned, yet it hadn’t. Not only that, but the connection between it and this ancient starship had been terminated.

As the heart of this ancient starship, not only did the Spirit Pearl contain a star map within it, but it was also the key to steering the ancient starship on inter-realm travels.

Without the Spirit Pearl, Dialo could only wait. With his fifth grade bloodline power, he couldn’t travel across the starry sky

without external help yet.

As time passed, the ancient starship continued to undertake the strikes of occasional unknown storms.

A layer of faint, cyan light that exuded a mysterious aura seemed to be protecting this ancient starship from the repeated strikes of inter-realm danger.

An unknown period of time passed.

In the ancient starship, a cluster of soul shadow suddenly started to flicker within a piece of cyan crystal that was used to hold the Spirit Pearl.

Standing beside the cyan crystal, Dialo's body shuddered. "One of our powerful experts have detected our soul crystal!"

A blurry soul shadow continued to flicker and morph within the cyan crystal which Dialo referred to as a 'soul crystal'. Soon, a weak soul message came from within, "Dialo! Why has your ancient starship still not reached the predetermined location?"

Off to the side, a Phantasm screamed upon hearing the vague message, "It's Lord Basto!"

Under Dialo's leadership, all of the Phantasms bowed respectfully toward the soul crystal, their eyes filled with reverence.

Dialo went on and explained in detail their encounter with the Qi warriors from the Realm of a Hundred Battles, the vanishing of the Spirit Pearl, and them steering the ancient starship out of the Realm of Dark Underworld. Afterwards, he pleaded, "We're incompetent and failed to bring the Spirit Pearl back to you. Please forgive us, Lord Basto."

Basto's soul shadow flickered unceasingly within the soul crystal as he said, "We're separated by an endless starry river that's full of danger. Even I won't be able to cross it and come to your location. From the look of it, we can only turn to plan B now: wait for our

people to descend upon the Domain of the Falling Stars to find the Spirit Pearl for you.

“Dialo, did you at least finish the other mission I gave you?”

“Rest assured, my lord,” Dialo answered. “I found the spatial rifts you told me about in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. And I revealed them with the things you bestowed upon me.”

Basto’s wild laughter came from within the soul crystal. “Good! Once the humans in the Domain of the Falling Stars discover what they can find inside of those spatial rifts, they’ll surely swarm into them. By that time, our people, as well as a few Demon and Fiend clans, will cast spells and enter the spatial tunnel together.

“It won’t be very long before we can contend against the humans in the Domain of the Falling Stars in the inter-realm spatial tunnel.

“The few spatial rifts we secretly deployed years ago are finally being put to use. Thanks to them, we won’t have to go through the spatial rifts sealed by the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace anymore. Instead, we can directly descend upon the Domain of the Falling Stars via the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

“Once we’re in the Domain of the Falling Stars, we’ll surely get the Spirit Pearl back and free you from your difficult situation!”

Chapter 475: Enlightenment

Nie Tian temporarily stayed in the stone pavilion where Li Ye and Pei Qiqi lived in Desolate City.

Hua Mu had messaged him a few times through the Sound Stone he had given him over the past few days. After learning that he was staying with Li Ye and Pei Qiqi, Hua Mu was relieved, and told him to keep waiting there.

Sitting quietly in the rough stone room, Nie Tian took out a piece of fourth grade spirit beast meat.

He felt that his appetite had gone through a strong boost since the green aura in his heart had finished its latest transcendence and awakened its new bloodline talent - Life Drain.

Before, he would need to consume a few dozen kilos of spirit beast meat to keep himself energetic.

However, after the latest transcendence of his bloodline aura, his daily consumption of spirit beast meat had at least tripled.

“Life Drain...” Looking at the piece of spirit beast meat that weighed about ten kilos, he suddenly came up with an idea. “Can I use Life Drain to absorb flesh power directly from the spirit beast meat?”

According to his master, all living creatures carried flesh power in their flesh and blood.

However, humans were born with feeble bodies, and therefore were greatly disadvantaged in this aspect. For this reason, they had developed the cultivation system of channeling the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth into their spiritual seas and focusing on the refinement of those spiritual seas.

Spirit beasts and many powerful outsider races also channeled energy from heaven and earth, but afterwards, they stored the energy in their flesh, blood, and bones.

This was the reason why spirit beasts and many outsiders possessed flesh power much more formidable than humans.

Some of the spirit beasts' flesh power would dissipate after they died, but the majority would still exist in their flesh, blood, and bones.

But Nie Tian could only consume the spirit beasts' flesh and blood, not their bones.

However, many humans forged powerful spiritual tools with spirit beast bones, for they had been nourished and refined by the spirit beasts' flesh power. Not only were they incomparably tough, but they also contained copious amounts of energy.

“Will I be able to absorb flesh power from a spirit beast's flesh and even bones with Life Drain?” With this thought, he placed his left hand on the large piece of spirit beast meat and inwardly activated his Life Drain bloodline talent.

As soon as he did, the green aura in his heart grew restless, and the crystal-like chains within it started to flicker brightly.

In the next moment, wisps of flesh aura, which normally stayed hidden in his blood, seemed to be suddenly awoken by the green aura.

Under the guidance of his mind, they rapidly gathered to his arm and poured into that piece of spirit beast meat.

The moment his flesh aura infiltrated the spirit beast meat, the flickering green spots within the crystal-like chains in the green aura started to swim about.

Then, he could sense wisps of pure flesh power being gradually extracted from the piece of spirit beast meat and merging with his own flesh aura.

Afterwards, carried by his own flesh aura, the wisps of mixed power gradually followed his arm back to his heart, where they were devoured by the green aura.

In merely a few seconds, the piece of spirit beast meat was drained of every bit of flesh power.

Afterwards, the piece of meat looked dry and shriveled. After Nie Tian cooked it on a fire and consumed it, it didn't produce anymore flesh power.

After a moment of silent pondering, he took out more spirit beast meat and drained the flesh power from it with the same method.

Within a very short period of time, every bit of flesh power absorbed from the spirit beast meat was devoured by the green aura.

Meanwhile, the processed meat failed to produce anymore flesh power even as Nie Tian ate it afterwards.

Nie Tian's eyes lit up as he muttered in a low voice, "Life Drain allows me to drain the spirit beast meat of every bit of its flesh power! And the efficiency is much higher than me eating the meat! I can probably drain the flesh power of hundreds of kilos of spirit beast meat within no more than a quarter hour!"

A shudder ran through Nie Tian as he thought about what he could do with his new finding. The next time he killed a powerful spirit beast, he would be able to channel all of its flesh power into himself shortly after its death, before it lost too much of its flesh power.

"If I can somehow use this bloodline talent on a spirit beast during battle, then its battle prowess will be greatly weakened due to its rapid loss of flesh power.

"It will be the same with outsiders. If I can use Life Drain on outsiders, and if they don't have a way to resist it or they were caught off guard, they'd also rapidly lose their ability to fight.

"However, I'll be able to strengthen myself and improve my battle prowess with the flesh power I take from them."

With these thoughts in mind, Nie Tian's eyes shone with the

light of excitement. As his understanding of this newly-acquired bloodline talent deepened, he gradually realized that it would have a destructive effect on spirit beasts and outsiders.

However, since humans were physically weak, and their power was mostly spiritual power that resided in their spiritual seas, Life Drain probably wouldn't work very well on them.

Human Qi warriors' strength mostly lay with their spiritual power. Even if they were drained of their insignificant flesh power, they would still be able to summon spiritual power and fight with their spiritual tools.

The effect of Life Drain would only be maximized when it was used on powerful beings that focused on the cultivation of their physical bodies.

"What's going on with the broken will of the titan I gathered from that magical place?" Nie Tian sent a wisp of his awareness into his spiritual sea to examine his spinning vortex of wood power.

The broken will of the guardian titan of the Tree of Life contained some unfathomable knowledge regarding wood power.

However, the will was broken into countless pieces that were rotating along with the vortex of wood power.

It seemed they were slowly regathering, yet Nie Tian knew it would still take some time for all of the pieces to recombine and become one again.

DING!

A crisp sound rang out from his Sound Stone. Nie Tian examined it with a wisp of his psychic awareness, and received a clear message from Hua Mu.

Hua Mu told him to stay with Li Ye, and that Zhen Huilan was coming back soon. Also, Hua Mu had talked to Zhen Huilan, and arrangements had been made. All he needed to do was listen to

Zhen Huilan.

Since Hua Mu needed to refine that Fruit of Life and extend his lifespan as quickly as possible, he wouldn't come back to him any time soon.

After a brief conversation with Hua Mu, Nie Tian took the initiative to end the connection.

In the following days, Nie Tian spent all day absorbing flesh power from spirit beast meat with Life Drain in Li Ye and Pei Qiqi's temporary residence, making preparations for the green aura's next transcendence.

Thanks to the awakening of his Life Drain talent, the efficiency with which he could absorb flesh power rose to a whole new level.

Later, he even discovered that what his exceptionally vigorous body needed from the spirit beast meat was actually just its flesh power.

Ever since he had started absorbing flesh power with the Life Drain, he had never felt hungry again.

From now on, he no longer needed to consume copious amount of spirit beast meat just to maintain the normal functions of his physical body. Apparently, after the awakening of Life Drain, that primitive way of taking in flesh power became unnecessary and obsolete.

That meant, from now on, even if he didn't eat anything at all, as long as he absorbed flesh power from spirit beast meat with Life Drain, he would be fine.

At that moment, Dong Li's voice suddenly rang out from outside. "Little Tian!"

Nie Tian went blank briefly before he opened his window. He looked down and saw Dong Li standing in the lonesome street.

Immediately afterwards, he went downstairs and out into the

street where Dong Li was standing. Surprised by her arrival, he asked, “How come you’re here?”

After the incident with Zhao Shanling, a large number of Desolate City residents had fled the city. Some others had gone to visit the mountain valley where the battle between Qi Bailu and Zhao Shanling had taken place. Therefore, the current Desolate City was sparsely populated.

No one could be seen anywhere around Nie Tian and Dong Li. The gates of the nearby stone pavilions were also shut.

“When did you return?” Dong Li asked in a soft voice.

“About ten days ago,” Nie Tian answered.

Dong Li grew angry. “I arrived in Desolate City shortly after Li Ye and Pei Qiqi. Why did you only stay here with them, but not come to visit me? I waited and waited, hoping that you’d come to find me, yet you’ve already forgotten about me! You ungrateful bastard!”

She had only come here because she needed to leave soon and couldn’t wait for him any longer.

Since she wasn’t fond of Pei Qiqi, she hadn’t show any intention of going into the residence in the first place. Instead, she had only shouted in the street to see if Nie Tian was there. Who knew that Nie Tian had been back for ten days. She was very upset about the fact that he had been here all along, yet he hadn’t gone to visit her.

“Our trip together has come to an end, so...” Nie Tian said with a confused expression.

Dong Li gave him a hard look. “What end? I helped you so much. You still owe me favors. Don’t you remember?”

A stumped expression appeared on Nie Tian’s face. “Umm...”

Dong Li suddenly lowered her voice and said, “I’m going to the Realm of Split Void. You need to come with me! The situation over

there is complicated. I could use your help!”

KREEEN! A window on the second floor was pushed open. It was Pei Qiqi.

Since Dong Li had spoken those last sentences in an extremely low voice, she didn't hear what she had just said. She just leaned against the window and looked down coldly at the two of them.

Upon noticing her, Dong Li's lips pursed into a smile as she immediately stopped bickering. Instead, she dragged Nie Tian away from the stone pavilion.

Chapter 476: The Common Destination

Nie Tian looked up and noticed Pei Qiqi, who was standing by the window and looking down at them with an expressionless face.

He nodded briefly at her as Dong Li forcibly dragged him towards the end of the street.

Only a few Qi warriors could be seen strolling about in the lonesome street. Most of them were at the Greater Heaven stage or the Worldly realm.

Those who dared to stay in Desolate City after word of Zhao Shanling's return had spread possessed either extraordinary cultivation bases or powerful backgrounds.

Dong Li dragged Nie Tian to the end of the street and entered a rough, small restaurant.

She led Nie Tian directly up to a room on the second floor. As she pushed the door open, he saw Dong Baijie sitting by a table in an unconstrained fashion, drinking by himself.

Upon seeing him, Dong Baijie rose to his feet and said with a smile on his face, "We meet again, Nie Tian."

The window to the street was shut. Plates of snacks and fruits filled the table, along with a half bottle of wine.

Nie Tian realized that Dong Li had already let go of him, as if she wanted to keep a distance from him in front of her elder brother.

Surprised, Nie Tian asked, "How come you're also here in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation?"

Dong Li sat by her brother's side, while Nie Tian sat across the table from him. As soon as he sat down, Dong Baijie poured a cup of alcohol for him and answered with a broad laugh, "I'm here for Little Li."

"Cheers!" Dong Baijie raised his cup and emptied it. Then, with a

sincere expression, he said, “This shows my respect for you. Thank you for helping Little Li in the Realm of Dark Underworld and bringing her such a great fortune in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. I knew you were no ordinary person!”

He had met with Dong Li soon after he had come to Desolate City with the other Dong Clan members.

Afterwards, he had a private meeting with Dong Li to ask about her recent experiences.

Dong Li had never kept secrets from her older brother, who loved her dearly. Therefore, she had told him about what she and Nie Tian had been through in the Realm of Dark Underworld.

She had even told him about them coming to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation to gather earthflame essence for Nie Tian’s Flame Dragon Armor, along with them finding that magical place, obtaining Fruits of Life, and Nie Tian letting her take the credit for finding Zhao Shanling.

Dong Baijie had been flabbergasted by their experiences. Meanwhile, he had an increasingly strong feeling that he had made the right decision by befriending Nie Tian.

However, since even Dong Li herself didn’t understand how Nie Tian had been able to find the entrance to that magical place or locate Zhao Shanling, she had left out some of the details.

Therefore, Dong Baijie had attributed all of Nie Tian’s incredible abilities to his three fragmentary star marks.

The fact that Dong Li had helped the Tool Sect find Zhao Shanling, thus ending the turmoil in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, had already put the Tool Sect in the Dong Clan’s debt. Not only had Dong Li received wide attention, but her status in the Dong Clan had also risen significantly.

That was before she revealed the fact that she had obtained a Fruit of Life.

After she returned to the Dong Clan and gave that Fruit of Life to their patriarch, her status in the Dong Clan would probably see another boost.

She had only gained such great fortunes because she had come to the Realm of the Unbounded Desolation with Nie Tian.

Meanwhile, Dong Baijie could tell that, after their trips to the Realm of Dark Underworld and the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, Dong Li no longer gnashed her teeth and stomped with fury when she talked about Nie Tian.

On the contrary, he noticed that, when she talked about their exciting encounters together now, she tended to beam with joy.

When he made jokes about her and Nie Tian, she would tell him to cut it out, yet her face was always full of smiles.

“Bottoms up!” Nie Tian chugged his cup of alcohol and then asked, “Well... did people in your clan ask about the thing I obtained from the Phantasms in the Realm of Dark Underworld?”

“Stop.” Dong Baijie interrupted him.

Nie Tian stopped and looked at him, his face filled with confusion.

During their secret meeting before he had gone to the Realm of Dark Underworld with Dong Li, Dong Baijie had told him not to worry, and that Dong Mingxuan would keep an eye on Dong Li and stop her if she crossed the line.

That meant Dong Mingxuan knew about his actual identity.

He thought Dong Li might have told people in her clan about his acquisition of the Spirit Pearl. He had gone on that trip to the Realm of Dark Underworld with powerful members of every major power in the Realm of a Hundred Battles. All the others had gained nothing, while he had ended up obtaining the Spirit Pearl. He had wondered how he should explain it.

Dong Baijie assumed a serious expression. “The truth is that I didn’t tell Uncle Mingxuan or anyone about your identity. No one knows what you’ve obtained in the Realm of Dark Underworld. Even if your identity was exposed and people learned that you went to the Realm of Dark Underworld under the name Wu Tian, you’ve got to insist that you obtained nothing, and that the thing that chased you somehow flew away on its own.”

A surprised expression spread across Nie Tian’s face.

A faint smile appeared on Dong Baijie’s face as he continued, “You’ve already done enough by bringing Little Li such great fortunes. Also, I don’t care what the other clans in the Realm of a Hundred Battles want.”

Nie Tian was surprised that not only would Dong Baijie not demand the Spirit Pearl from him, but he would also help him keep it a secret.

Dong Li rolled her eyes at him. “Don’t worry. No one’s ever seen you with it anyways. As long as you deny having it and I don’t tell people you do, things will be fine.”

After a pause, she added, “Sectmaster Li and the others from the Blood Sect returned to Desolate City before you did. I took the liberty of telling them that you still had important business to attend to, and you had already left Desolate City. They left for the Realm of Flame Heaven after hearing that.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Oh, I see.”

Seeing the puzzled expression on Nie Tian’s face, Dong Li explained, “We received word that the Heaven Palace Sect and the Flame God Sect are still looking for you. Not many people know about you coming to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. It’d safer for you and the Blood Sect if you don’t spend too much time with people from the Blood Sect.”

Dong Baijie nodded slightly. “You stayed at Li Ye and Pei Qiqi’s.

You must have heard about the changes in the Realm of Split Void. Do you want to go on an exploration trip with us?”

Anticipation also filled Dong Li’s face as she said, “It won’t be long before the word of what happened in the Realm of Split Void spreads to every corner of the Domain of the Falling Stars. By that time, every major sect will send people there. Our clan is already making arrangements and preparations. You’ll be safe if you go with us. What do you think?”

“Well...” Nie Tian pondered in silence for a few seconds. “I’ll be there in the Realm of Split Void. Perhaps I’ll also enter those spatial rifts. But I’ve already promised someone that I’ll go with Master Zhen.”

“You promised Pei Qiqi, did you?” Dong Li asked with a cold snort.

“Not her,” Nie Tian explained.

Dong Baijie didn’t dwell on it. “Alright. Since we’re going to the same destination, I suppose it doesn’t really matter if we enter those spatial rifts together. Perhaps we’ll meet on the other side. We might be able to work with each other then.”

With these words, he handed a Sound Stone to Nie Tian and said, “Keep this Sound Stone on you. After we enter the dimension inside those spatial rifts, as long as we’re within 250 kilometers of each other, we’ll be able to communicate through it. There are only three of them. You, Little Li, and I each will hold one.”

“Okay.” Nie Tian accepted the Sound Stone and put it away in his bracelet of holding.

“Keep in mind that the Void Illusion Mountain Range will soon become the target of every major sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars, so be careful,” Dong Baijie reminded him solemnly. “You’d better not reveal your identity to anyone, lest the Heaven Palace Sect or the Flame God Sect get to you. As powerful and lofty as

Master Zhen is, she won't necessarily be able to shelter you. You'd better act with discretion."

"Thanks, I got it." Nie Tian nodded.

"Come on," Dong Baijie said with a broad laugh, raising his wine cup. "Enough about trivial matters. Drink up!"

Smiling brightly, Dong Li also rolled up her sleeves, raised her wine cup, and started drinking with them.

Dong Baijie and Dong Li brought out quite a few drinking games. As Nie Tian chugged down one cup of hard alcohol after another, his clear eyes gradually grew sleepy.

Upon seeing that, Dong Baijie proposed to end the drinking party and saw Nie Tian out of the restaurant.

After bidding farewell to Dong Baijie, Nie Tian briefly circulated his internal power, and the smell of alcohol on him rapidly dissipated.

Soon, he returned to the stone pavilion where Pei Qiqi and Li Ye lived.

Upon entering the front gate, he saw Zhen Huilan sitting in the hall. Li Ye and Pei Qiqi were standing beside her. The three of them were talking and laughing.

The moment Zhen Huilan saw him, she recognized him and said, looking surprised, "It's you."

An embarrassed smile appeared on Nie Tian's face as he bowed respectfully towards her and said, "Greetings, Senior Zhen. Sorry for not informing you earlier of my..." He realized that Zhen Huilan must have found out about his identity.

Zhen Huilan waved her hand. "That's alright."

Eyebrows furrowed, she asked, "How did you end up with that girl from the Dong Clan?"

"Girl from the Dong Clan?" Pei Qiqi went blank briefly before

suddenly coming to a realization. “That woman you were with was Dong Li from the Dong Clan?! The same woman who organized her Fang members to chase after you outside Shatter City?!”

“You know that she’s Song Li?” Nie Tian was taken aback.

“Master just told me.” Pei Qiqi’s face turned ice-cold. “If you know who she was, why were you so intimate with her? How open-minded of you! Have you forgotten all about what she’s done?”

Nie Tian felt increasingly embarrassed. “Umm... It’s quite complicated. It’ll take forever to explain.”

Zhen Huilan looked deeply at him. After a moment of silence, she said, “Forget about that. We set out for Shatter City now. You just remember to handle your relationship with her properly. That girl is full of vicious tricks. She did whatever she liked and took quite a few lives in the Realm of Split Void. I suggest you keep your distance so that you don’t get yourself killed.”

Nie Tian nodded obediently.

Chapter 477: Experts Swarming In

In Shatter City in the Realm of Split Void...

Nie Tian, Zhen Huilan, Li Ye, and Pei Qiqi flashed into appearance in the large-scale, inter-realm teleportation portal at the center of the city.

According to Zhen Huilan, he could no longer use his identity as Hua Tian now that he was back in Shatter City.

She even forbade him to use the mask Dong Baijie had gifted him, which he had worn when he had assumed the name Wu Tian.

Back when he had lived in Shatter City, he had used the name Hua Tian, but hadn't changed his appearance.

Almost everyone in the Realm of Flame Heaven knew how he actually looked. Meanwhile, he had been to the Heaven Palace Sect and helped relieve the crisis in the Realm of Flame Heaven without altering his appearance. Therefore, they all knew his actual face.

Since the Heaven Palace Sect and the Flame God Sect were both secretly looking for him, he had to avoid revealing his actual appearance and stop using the name Hua Tian.

The same went for 'Wu Tian', which was the identity he had used when he had gone on a exploration trip with people from every force in the Realm of a Hundred Battles. Since too many people were familiar with the name Wu Tian, Zhen Huilan told him to discard it as well.

The reason why Zhen Huilan had instructed him to do so was because she knew that Qi warriors from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars were swarming into the Realm of Split Void. Large amounts of powerful experts from numerous sects would show up in Shatter City, Ash City, and the Land of the Abandoned. He had to do this to avoid being recognized and stay out of trouble.

In order to do that, Zhen Huilan gave him a new mask, which

came with a brand-new identity: ‘Mu Han’.

Not only that, but that mask also had a special effect. When Nie Tian put it on, it would create a mysterious and undetectable ward over him, masking even his spiritual sea.

It would only allow Nie Tian’s spiritual sea to release faint traces of spiritual power and flame power.

She told him that when he was wearing that mask, normal cultivators would only take him as an early Greater Heaven stage Qi warrior who practiced nothing but fire-attributed incantations.

As for his star power and wood power, as long as he didn’t wield them, they wouldn’t be able to detect them.

By “normal people”, Zhen Huilan was referring to all Qi warriors below the Soul realm.

The value of this mask far surpassed the one Dong Baijie had given him. Any Qi warrior below the Soul realm would only see him as a plain-looking, early Greater Heaven stage Qi warrior who practiced fire-attributed incantations, and nothing more.

Zhen Huilan had given him this mask to hide his special features and avoid any unnecessary attention.

As soon as they stepped out of the portal, Lu Kang, the Blood Skull member who managed the portal, approached Zhen Huilan and greeted her respectfully.

“This is Mu Han, a distant nephew of mine,” Zhen Huilan said. “Get him an identity medallion, will you?”

Without any hesitation, Liu Kang ordered his subordinates to create a brand-new identity medallion for Nie Tian. Nie Tian, meanwhile, paid the required amount of spirit stones and obtained his right to stay in Shatter City.

“Master Zhen, our head wants me to tell you as soon as I see you return that he wants to see you,” Liu Kang said.

“Where is Cai Lan?” Zhen Huilan asked with furrowed eyebrows.

“He’s in the Void Illusion Mountain Range,” Liu Kang answered. “Not just him; all of our powerful experts have poured into the Void Illusion Mountain Range.”

Zhen Huilan nodded slightly. “How are they doing over there?”

A bitter smile appeared on Liu Kang’s face. “We’ve been fighting the Wild Fire and the Dark Moon over the rights to those spatial rifts. Recently, battles between the three powers usually break out around the clock. We’ve already lost many people. The Wild Fire and Dark Moon have also suffered great losses.”

“Cai Lan is such a dotard!” Zhen Huilan blurted with cold snort, not mincing her words at all. “As soon as those spatial rifts appeared, I sent people to warn him not to get involved. The dimension those spatial rifts lead to are of great importance. It might have something to do with the Void Palace Sect. There might even exist precious materials that can help late Soul realm experts advance to the Void realm.

“Such important spatial rifts are not something the Blood Skull, the Dark Moon, or the Wild Fire can take for their own.

“Them scrambling for it has no meaning at all. By the time powerful experts from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars enter the Void Illusion Mountain Range, how do they expect to guard those spatial rifts?”

Liu Kang sighed deeply and said, “At first, our head didn’t know those spatial rifts would lead to such a special dimension. Also, he didn’t expect that word of them would spread so quickly. By the time he realized how important they were, all the blood spilled had already made all three sides furious with each other, so no one wants to back away at his point.”

Zhen Huilan pondered briefly, then asked, “How about the situation inside the city?”

“Recently, a large number of foreign cultivators have come to Shatter City via our inter-spatial teleportation portal, but as soon as they arrive, they leave directly for the Void Illusion Mountain Range,” Liu Kang answered truthfully. “Also, a lot of Worldly realm and Profound realm experts have arrived during the past few days. They usually go directly from Shatter City to the Void Illusion Mountain Range. Seeing their formidable strength, even the Hunters didn’t dare to ambush them.

“The same goes for Ash City and the Land of the Abandoned.

“Many foreign cultivators have learned of what has happened in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, and are thus swarming into our realm through Shatter City, Ash City, and the Land of the Abandoned. Their common targets are those few spatial rifts in the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

“Some powerful foreign forces are even secretly setting up inter-realm teleportation portals in certain locations in our realm.”

Zhen Huilan remained silent. Gazing off in the direction of the Void Illusion Mountain Range, she said, “Calamity looms over the Realm of Split Void. Only if the Blood Skull pulls back to Shatter City and holds fast behind these walls will you be able to survive it. If Cai Lan can’t lose the greed in his heart, I’m afraid the Blood Skull won’t escape their destiny of being eliminated from the Realm of Split Void. It’ll only be a matter of time.”

Lu Kang stood aghast.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

As they talked, the inter-realm teleportation portal started to shine dazzlingly again.

About ten people dressed in the Heaven Palace Sect’s noble garments flashed into appearance.

The first one to strut out of the portal was none other than the late Profound realm Huang Fan. He was followed by Su Lin and a

few other Heaven Palace Sect disciples, who seemed to be at the Greater Heaven stage, Worldly realm, or Profound realm.

Upon seeing Huang Fan, Nie Tian's expression flickered slightly.

Lu Kang braced himself and walked up to Huang Fan. "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Shatter City. Umm... please pay for your stay with spirit stones."

As a rule, all foreigners who came to Shatter City via the teleportation portal would need to pay for using the portal. If they wished to stay in Shatter City, they'd have to pay more spirit stones to acquire identity medallions.

This was one of the ways the Blood Skull had gathered its fortune throughout the years.

Before, when foreign Profound realm experts had come to Shatter City, they had all abided by the rule. No one had shed their pretense of respect for the Blood Skull.

However, that was no longer the case.

Huang Fan shot a cold glance at Lu Kang as he pointed at the pattern on his chest, which was a magnificent palace looming through clouds, and said, "Do you recognize this?"

A bitter expression filled Lu Kang's face as he nodded and said, "Of course I do, but it's a rule that has been around for a long time that..."

Huang Fan's brow furrowed. "Now that you've recognized our sect's sigil, how dare you ask us for spirit stones? Tell your head, Cai Lan, to come here and talk to me himself, if you want me to give you spirit stones."

"Well, our head isn't in Shatter City right now." Lu Kang had a headache over the tough situation.

With a fake smile, Huang Fan said, "Oh, so he's not in the city. He wouldn't dare to do anything to me even if he was here along

with all of your powerful experts, not to mention that he's not even in the city!"

With these words, Huang Fan gestured to the other Heaven Palace members. "Let's go. We're going to the Void Illusion Mountain Range. I want to see if any of you dares to stop us or ask us for a single spirit stone!"

The other Heaven Palace Sect members sneered and didn't bother to say anything.

Lu Kang and the other Blood Skull members on the side didn't dare to do anything. They could only watch Huang Fan and the others swagger away, completely ignoring the Blood Skull's rule.

Huang Fan stopped in front of Zhen Huilan on his way to the city gate.

He put away his arrogance when facing her. With a half bow, he said, "Long time no see, Master Zhen."

"The Heaven Palace Sect is indeed revered everywhere," Zhen Huilan said in a sarcastic way.

"Hahaha." Huang Fan let out an emotionless laugh and said, "Who do they think they are? They don't have a single Soul realm expert throughout the entire Blood Skull. What right do they have to charge me spirit stones? Before, there was nothing worth noting in the Realm of Split Void. Only because of that did we let unworthy organizations like the Blood Skull, Wild Fire, and Dark Moon do whatever they wanted here. Now that those spatial rifts have appeared, it's only natural for the rules to change."

With these words, he led the other Heaven Palace Sect experts toward the city gate.

Su Lin and some other powerful experts from the Heaven Palace Sect also bowed slightly as they passed Zhen Huilan to show their respect for her.

As for Nie Tian, Li Ye, and Pei Qiqi, who were standing right

beside Zhen Huilan, their gazes just rapidly swept across them. Apparently, they didn't attach much importance to them.

Though furious at heart, Lu Kang and the other Blood Skull members didn't dare to say a word as they watched the people from the Heaven Palace Sect swaggering away.

Chapter 478: Broken Order

When they were gone, Zhen Huilan said, frowning, “Lu Kang, things like this have been happening a lot recently, right?”

With a bitter smile, Lu Kang nodded. “Yeah, a few other powerful sects also refused to pay us spirit stones after arriving in the city via the teleportation portal you’ve established for us.”

After a brief pause, she said, “I have a suggestion for you, considering Cai Lan isn’t here to keep order. From now on, turn this teleportation portal off and tell people that it’s broken. And since you don’t have some of the spiritual materials needed, you won’t be able to fix it within a short period of time.”

Lu Kang seemed to be in a very difficult situation as he said, “But if we do that, we might offend the foreigners who want to come to our realm through our portal. Our head also thought about shutting the portal down. However, he was afraid that if we did, foreign experts would seek trouble with him in the future.”

Zhen Huilan sighed. “You need to survive the imminent calamity first. It’s hard to say if there will be a future for the Blood Skull yet, so I suggest you focus on the present.”

Lu Kang sighed repeatedly over their difficult situation.

“You three go ahead and return to our residence while I go and learn about the situation inside and outside the city,” Zhen Huilan commanded. “Afterwards, I’ll determine when to go to the Void Illusion Mountain Range.”

Pei Qiqi nodded. “Okay.”

Immediately afterwards, Nie Tian and Li Ye followed her to their residence in Shatter City.

On their way, Nie Tian noticed that there were many more Greater Heaven stage foreign cultivators in the streets than before. He even saw a few Worldly realm foreign cultivators giving out

glittering spirit stones to others in exchange for information.

They mostly asked about the situation in the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

After returning to their residence, the three of them weren't in the mood to practice cultivation. Now that an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty loomed over all of Shatter City, everyone felt insecure and uneasy, as if a storm was coming.

"Thankfully I was wearing this new mask when Huang Fan came," Nie Tian thought to himself, looking overjoyed as he touched the slightly chilly mask he was wearing. "If I were wearing the old one Dong Baijie had given me, he might have already recognized me."

Deep in the night, a bloodcurdling scream broke the silence.

Nie Tian, who was cultivating with Star Stones, was instantly awoken. With a grim expression, he pushed his window open and looked down into the lonesome street.

He had lived in Shatter City for some time, but not once had he seen someone openly break the Blood Skull's rules and kill people in Shatter City before.

The Blood Skull forbade all sorts of fights inside the city.

If people wished to fight each other, they would have to acquire permission from the Blood Skull, and the fight would have to take place in the Blood Fighting Pit inside the Blood Skull's headquarters.

If fights broke out in other locations in the city, the Blood Skull would immediately send out powerful experts to end the fight and punish the parties involved.

But now, during the first night he had returned to Shatter City, he heard someone's agonized shriek right before death.

As he stood by the window and pondered the situation, he caught

sight of a middle Greater Heaven stage man being pierced through the abdomen by a masked, black-garbed early Worldly realm expert with a spear.

The man let out a miserable cry and died.

The black-garbed killer dragged his victim's body into the shadow of the street, and then disappeared after a quick search.

Even though it happened quite far down the street, Nie Tian was able to get a clear view of the whole thing. Afterwards, his expression turned increasingly grim.

KREEEN!

The wooden door to his room was pushed open. Pei Qiqi and Li Ye came in and walked to the window where Nie Tian was standing.

Li Ye didn't drink today. His eyes remained sober as he said in a low voice, "The order of Shatter City has been broken. When I returned, those who worked for me told me that killings take place inside the city every night now. Many powerful foreign experts and even those who live in the city no longer respect the rules set forth by the Blood Skull.

"Right now, all of the Blood Skull's powerful experts have been summoned to the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

"With the forces they have left in Shatter City, they're no longer able to keep order. Plus, rumor has it that Cai Lan might not even be able to return from the Void Illusion Mountain Range alive."

Pei Qiqi was as expressionless as always as she spoke, though the look in her eyes had become very grim. "But at least we're still fairly safe here. After all, no matter whether it's those rule-breakers who live in the city or foreign experts, they all know who our master is and what she's capable of. As long as we don't leave this residence, we won't become targets and be dragged into this chaos."

Li Ye let out a sigh. “Bad things are about to happen to the Blood Skull, the Wild Fire, and the Dark Moon. The word of the appearance of those spatial rifts has already spread like wildfire and attracted the attention of too many powerful sects and clans from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars. Before, they didn’t consider the Realm of Split Void valuable, and thus didn’t attach any significance to it.”

He shook his head, a bothered expression appearing on his face. “But now...”

Staring into the lonesome street, Nie Tian said, “What’s the situation over in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?”

“Who knows?” Li Ye said with a wry smile. “People are greedy by nature. Cai Lan is no different. He’s well-aware of how special and important those spatial rifts are to many powerful sects, yet he still insisted on scrambling for the rights over them. But the Blood Skull isn’t an old and powerful sect like the Heaven Palace Sect, the Flame God Sect, or the Tool Sect, and he isn’t a Soul realm expert himself.”

Pei Qiqi picked up the conversation and said, “I wonder how long the turbulent situation in the Realm of Split Void is going to last this time. It’s even hard to say whether the Blood Skull, the Wild Fire, and the Dark Moon will still be here when the turmoil comes to an end. Many people have seen through the situation, so naturally, they’ll no longer respect the rules set forth by the Blood Skull.”

With a pause, she added, “Perhaps the same things are also taking place in Ash City and the Land of the Abandoned. I doubt that there’s a place in the Realm of Split Void that’s completely safe now. We’ll need to be more careful from now on; no more willful actions.” Apparently, she had realized how huge this crisis was going to be.

Nie Tian listened in silence as he suddenly remembered Zhao

Shanling, who had single-handedly contended against Zhen Huilan, Zhu Bin, and Qin Yi.

Many years ago, that man had wiped out numerous sects and killed countless Qi warriors with his Death Reign in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. However, he had behaved just as arrogantly and willfully as always after his return, and no one had been able to subdue him.

The reason why he had behaved as such was three-fold. Firstly, he was a Soul realm expert; secondly, he possessed the Death Reign; thirdly, he was an unmatched expert in spatial magics.

Similarly, the reason why Huang Fan had dared to openly disobey the Blood Skull's rules, which was none other than a slap to their face, was because he was a late Worldly realm expert backed by the Heaven Palace Sect.

Nie Tian thought to himself, "As long as people are strong enough, they'll be able to tear any rule or order into shreds."

He gradually realized that if he were at the late Soul realm, he wouldn't need to hide from anyone or wear that mask anymore. He would be able to openly travel between any realm in the Domain of the Falling Stars and do whatever he wanted. No one would be able to stop him.

"I need to become stronger and acquire a higher cultivation base!" The light of the fragmentary stars started to shine in the depths of his eyes as he grew more and more resolute.

"Nie Tian, you should give your guest elder's identity medallion to Li Ye," Pei Qiqi suggested, "so that he can go to the Blood Skull's headquarters in the morning to trade in your contribution points for spirit stones and the spiritual materials you need. It's not certain whether the Blood Skull will still be standing when this whole thing is over, so you'd better cash in your contribution points for killing those Dark Moon members and Hunters as soon as possible. If you're late, the Blood Skull may fall, and then you

won't get anything."

"She's right," Li Ye chimed in.

Without any hesitation, Nie Tian tossed the guest elder's identity medallion he had obtained from the Blood Skull to Li Ye and said, "I'm in need of wood-attributed and fire-attributed spiritual materials. If you come across any high-level spirit beast meat, please get me some as well. If there's any points left, trade them for spirit stones."

Li Ye grabbed the identity medallion. "No problem. I suppose the Blood Skull will probably give face to our master and cash the contribution points, and I'll be able to get you quite a few items with the points you have in here."

"You just stay here and rest," Pei Qiqi said with a commanding tone. "Don't leave this residence to roam about in the city."

Nie Tian nodded. "Okay."

After the two of them left his room, Nie Tian shut his window tight and started refining his vortex of star power with Star Stones again.

After his earlier enlightenment about his insufficient strength and poor cultivation base, he felt a strong sense of urgency.

Over the following days, he never left his room or paid any attention to the killings that would occur in the city every night. Instead, he focused on practicing cultivation with fire-attributed spiritual materials and Star Stones, as well as refining his powers and pushing his spiritual sea to its limits.

Meanwhile, he continued to absorb flesh power from the spirit beast meat he had purchased from the Dong Clan using Life Drain in order to strengthen the green aura in his heart.

As for his vortex of wood power, he didn't refine it specifically, since the rich wood power he had gathered from the magical place had already refined it and readied it for his next breakthrough in

cultivation.

Chapter 479: The Thunder Mountain Sect

“Here. These are the things I traded for you with your contribution points.” With these words, Li Ye unloaded his ring of holding and filled the floor before Nie Tian with a pile of fire-attributed spiritual materials, a pile of wood-attributed spiritual materials, and a pile of three thousand spirit stones.

Then, looking at the bracelet of holding on Nie Tian’s wrist, he said, “Now that you’ve entered the Greater Heaven stage, a ring of holding will suit you better. It’s time to retire that bracelet of holding.”

After a moment of pondering, Nie Tian nodded, and emptied his bracelet of holding into a ring of holding.

The capacity of that ring of holding was ten times that of a bracelet of holding. The inside of it was a completely different space.

As he stored the items Li Ye had traded for him from the Blood Skull into his ring of holding, he asked, “What took you so long?”

Considering Li Ye’s relationship with Zhen Huilan, the Blood Skull would never dare to treat him lightly. Meanwhile, they knew Li Ye’s relationship with him, so when Li Ye went to trade his contribution points for materials holding his guest elder’s identity medallion, he shouldn’t have run into any difficulty.

However, Li Ye had been gone for days before he finally came back with all those items. This wasn’t normal.

Li Ye gave him a hard look. “You should be thankful for such a result. These are different times. I was only able to cash those contribution points for you because the Blood Skull had to give face to my master. If it were someone else, I doubt that they’d have been able to cash their contribution points from the Blood Skull now.”

Nie Tian was confused. “Why is that?”

With a sigh, Li Ye took out a bottle of alcohol, chugged down a cup, and said, “The situation has gone south. Many of the Blood Skull’s guest elders have refused to fight for them. Most of them have already left the Realm of Split Void, and cashed all of their contribution points before they did.

“Too many guest elders have demanded spiritual materials and spirit stones in exchange for their contribution points, which is putting the Blood Skull under a great burden.

“Now, the Blood Skull have already placed limits on the amount of materials and spirit stones guest elders can trade for at one time.

“It was all thanks to my master’s influence that they agreed to cash all of your contribution points in one go.

“Even still, since they’ve lost too many spiritual materials, so they needed a few days to gather those fire-attributed and wood-attributed spiritual materials for you.”

Taken aback, Nie Tian asked, “What in the world has happened in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?”

Eyebrows furrowed, Li Ye said, “It seems that Cai Lan has suffered a great loss from his battle against the Dark Moon and the Wild Fire. Meanwhile, the Blood Skull have stopped allowing others to use their cultivation rooms, only their own members. So even if you have tons of spirit stones, you won’t be able to rent any of those cultivation rooms anymore.”

Li Ye’s words came as another shock to him. He had originally planned to rent one of the cultivation rooms filled with rich spiritual Qi using the spirit stones Li Ye had traded for him.

“For now, those cultivation rooms are only open to the Blood Skull’s core members,” Li Ye continued. “Many of them sustained injuries in battle in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, and they need those cultivation rooms to recover their battle prowess so

that they can march back to the battlefield as soon as possible.”

With these words, he walked out of Nie Tian’s room, telling him not to concern himself with what happened in the city, focus on his cultivation, and wait for his master’s return.

Nie Tian sent a wisp of psychic awareness into his ring of holding. After a brief scan, he was somewhat disappointed as he thought to himself, “It’s a pity that he didn’t get me any high-level spirit beast meat.”

Due to the impurities that filled the air in the Realm of Split Void, the surviving spirit beasts had mutated. Their bones, skin, and teeth were still of value, but since no one would eat their meat, hunters would usually discard the meat altogether.

For that reason, none of the Qi warriors in Shatter City had any spirit beast meat in their possession.

In exchange for his contribution points at the Blood Skull, Li Ye had gotten him some fire-attributed and wood-attributed spiritual materials, as well as three thousand spirit stones.

He had given basically his entire collection over the years to Nie Donghai and Nie Qian when they had reunited in the Realm of a Hundred Battles. Because of that, he only had five thousand spirit stones, twenty or so spirit jades, and small amounts of fire-attributed and wood-attributed spiritual materials, along with a sizable pile of Star Stones.

As for spiritual tools, the Flame Dragon Armor and the Flame Star were the only ones he had.

The Flame Dragon Armor had consumed too much flame power, and thus couldn’t function for the time being, which left the Flame Star as his only usable spiritual tool.

Meanwhile, after the awakening of the Life Drain bloodline talent, the rate at which he consumed spirit beast meat had increased significantly. Therefore, the spirit beast meat he had

purchased from the Dong Clan was also running out.

Shaking his head in frustration, he thought to himself, “If I knew I’d awaken such a bloodline talent, I would have bought more spirit beast meat in the Dong Clan.”

Then, he took out some Star Stones and started absorbing star power again in an attempt to achieve his next breakthrough as soon as possible.

Soon, night fell...

Silence made the night seem endless. Cultivating, Nie Tian could hear people scream from time to time.

A loud and furious shout suddenly rang out from the center of the city. “Who are you?!”

Startled, Nie Tian opened his eyes, left his room, and jumped to the top of the highest pavilion in this residence, which belonged to Zhen Huilan.

SHEW!

Pei Qiqi flashed into appearance beside him. Standing shoulder to shoulder, they gazed off towards the center of the city.

However, since they were a significant distance away from the center of the city and some high buildings blocked their sight, they weren’t able to see anything with their bare eyes.

After a moment of hesitation, Nie Tian formed and unleashed a Heaven Eye. With great caution, he controlled it to float towards the central square.

Under the night sky, he saw an old woman dressed in cyan garments, which were filled with exquisite lightning patterns, floating above the inter-realm teleportation portal.

A mountain formed by interweaving lightning bolts was embroidered on the old woman’s chest.

Floating in the air, the old woman formed a series of profound

hand seals, and immediately afterwards, a dragon formed by pure lightning power flew out of her splayed palm, roaring as it did.

Beside the inter-realm teleportation portal, Lu Kang and other Blood Skull members yelled loudly, though they didn't dare to rush forward to stop the lightning dragon.

The cyan-garbed old woman, who was slightly hunched and whose face was filled with wrinkles, cast another spell. Her shriveled, claw-like hands made a few grabbing motions in the air.

As she did, the inter-realm teleportation portal which Cai Lan had asked Zhen Huilan to establish for him rapidly disintegrated. Pieces of spiritual materials, including precious Space Spirit Jades, rapidly few into the old woman's cuffs and disappeared.

"I'm Lei Yao from the Realm of Earth Sieve. I'm only borrowing your inter-realm teleportation portal. I'll give it back soon." The cyan-garbed old woman said as she gathered the numerous spiritual materials that composed that teleportation portal.

Lu Kang and his crowd of subordinates couldn't even get close to the disintegrating teleportation portal now that the lightning dragon was hovering right above it. They could only watch the portal being taken away.

Nie Tian could sense via his Heaven Eye, which was floating stealthily by the central square, that many wisps of others' soul awarenesses had gathered in this area.

Lei Yao had clearly noticed that she was being spied on by many others' soul awarenesses. However, since there were so many of them in her surroundings, she didn't pay special attention to Nie Tian's Heaven Eye.

"I hope you can understand." Lei Yao said with an expression that looked as if she were forced to do this. "The Heaven Expanse Sect from our realm still needs to come to the Realm of Split Void. Since your teleportation portal is broken, we'll fix it for you. Also,

it'll be intact and working when we return it to you. Thank you. No need to see me off."

With these words, she summoned the lightning dragon back to her side as she morphed into a bolt of cyan lightning and shot out of Shatter City.

In the central square, not a single part of the inter-realm teleportation portal was left.

Seeing that Lei Yao had disappeared into the darkness, Nie Tian hastily retracted his Heaven Eye. Then, he turned to Pei Qiqi, who was standing next to him, and said, "This is no different from open robbery!"

Even though Pei Qiqi didn't have a clear view of what had happened, she had heard Lei Yao's words, and thus learned about the situation.

"Lei Yao is a late Profound realm expert from the Thunder Mountain Sect," Pei Qiqi said, her tone as cold as usual. "As the two major sects in the Realm of Earth Sieve, the Thunder Mountain Sect and the Heaven Expanse Sect had maintained good relationships with each other. Many of their disciples even got married, which further strengthened the friendship between the two sects. She only dares to seize the Blood Skull's teleportation portal by force because the Blood Skull's head hasn't entered the Soul realm."

Li Ye suddenly echoed out from behind them. "Damn it! That teleportation portal was established by our master! I don't care whether she gives the Blood Skull face or not. Since she must know that our master is the creator, she should have at least talked to our master before doing such a thing!"

Pei Qiqi also snorted angrily and said, "Our master came from the Tool Sect. Even though she's left the Tool Sect, her connection with the Tool Sect will always be there. Things like this would have never happened before. But now..."

“Zhao Shanling returned to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation. His Death Reign devastated the whole realm. However, the Tool Sect eventually failed to capture him.

“Meanwhile, the Flame God Sect took advantage of the opportunity to gather earthflame essence, which Xia Yi will use to attempt to break through into the late Soul realm. Once Xia Yi succeeds, he’ll most likely return to the Realm of Unbounded Desolation with Zhao Shanling. The two of them will plunge the Tool Sect into a world of misery.

“The Thunder Mountain Sect must know that, at this moment, the Tool Sect is busy enough with their own affairs, so they dared to do such a thing.”

Li Ye grew increasingly furious as he exclaimed, “That old witch! The first thing I’ll do after becoming a Spirit Channeling grade equipment forger is to go to the Thunder Mountain Sect and settle this matter with them!”

Chapter 480: Six Spatial Rifts

The appearance of Lei Yao and her open robbery of the Blood Skull made everyone in Shatter City worry about their safety.

After that incident, the Blood Skull finally lost the last remaining stateliness they had spent so long to establish. More and more brawls and killings took place inside the city. Screams could be heard everywhere.

Many cultivators with low cultivation bases felt insecure and anxious all day long, seeing that the teleportation portal, which they had planned to use to flee the Realm of Split Void, was gone.

Without that teleportation portal, people from the other realms weren't able to enter the city and those in the city weren't able to leave.

That caused bloody battles to take place around the clock over the following few days. Blood-curdling screams could be heard day and night.

As people's minds were gradually taken up by desperation, they started to give in to their dark side.

One day, Hu Rong from the Spirit Condor came over to Zhen Huilan's residence and stated that Zhen Huilan had asked him to take Nie Tian, Li Ye, and Pei Qiqi to a special location.

Therefore, the three of them followed Hu Rong to one of the Spirit Condor's secret locations in Shatter City, which was a dilapidated residence on a old block.

As soon as they stepped through the door, Cai Yuan, the young lord of the Blood Skull, exclaimed, with Cai Yue standing beside him, "Qiqi!"

"Why are you here?" Pei Qiqi asked, curious.

Just as Cai Yuan was about to answer her, he noticed that a

stranger had come with her and Li Ye.

Cai Yuan failed to recognize Nie Tian with his mask on.

“Okay, everyone is here now.” Standing in the middle of the room, Hu Rong cleared his throat before squatting down and placing his hand on the smooth stone floor.

As he did, the floor split into a narrow stone path. Pointing down at it, he beckoned for everyone to go down with him.

They formed a line and went down the stone path. At the end of the path, they found a small room, where a small teleportation portal in the middle was glowing with misty, white light.

Cai Yuan’s face instantly dropped as he stared Hu Rong in the eye and exclaimed, “There’s a teleportation portal here! How dare you set up a private teleportation portal here without our authorization?”

“Calm down, young lord. Your father knows about this teleportation portal,” Hu Rong said with a smile. “We received your father’s permission, and so we didn’t break any rules.”

“How would my father give you permission to do this?!” Cai Yuan didn’t quite believe him.

“Hahaha, well, you’ll be able to ask him yourself shortly.” Hu Rong didn’t explain the details. Pointing at Cai Yuan, Cai Yue, and Li Ye, he said, “This teleportation portal can only teleport three people at a time. The three of you shall get in first.”

“Where are we going?” Li Ye and Cai Yuan asked simultaneously.

“The Void Illusion Mountain Range, of course,” Hu Rong answered with a smile. “Since the Thunder Mountain Sect has taken away the Blood Skull’s teleportation portal, you can only go through this small one. Young Lord, your father knows that Shatter City is no longer safe for you. Since he’s currently in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, he naturally wants you to go to his side.”

Cai Yuan and Cai Yue's expressions grew grim, bereft of the invincible spirit they usually had.

Recently, the brother-sister pair had personally witnessed what had happened to the Blood Skull's reign.

Worldly realm and Profound realm experts had acted unruly under their watch, yet there was nothing the Blood Skull could do to stop them. A few days ago, Lei Yao robbing them of their teleportation portal had come as another great shock to them.

"Li Ye, your master is also in the Void Illusion Mountain Range now," Hu Rong said. "She asked me to send you there as well."

"Okay." Li Ye nodded as he walked into the small teleportation portal.

Cai Yuan and Cai Yue also stepped into it without much hesitation.

"Safe travels." As Hu Rong activated the spell formation, the small teleportation portal was instantly enveloped by blinding spiritual light. In the next moment, the three of them vanished from within the portal.

"Their destination isn't the Void Illusion Mountain Range!" Pei Qiqi suddenly exclaimed, her Ethereal Swords flashing into appearance.

As an expert of spatial magics, she had noticed the anomaly as soon as the portal was activated.

The intensity of the spatial energy fluctuations created during domestic teleportations was different from that of the spatial energy fluctuations created during inter-realm teleportations. Even though Hu Rong had told them that Li Ye and the others were going to the Void Illusion Mountain Range, she had sensed violent fluctuations which only inter-realm teleportations would create.

"Please calm down, Miss Pei!" Hu Rong hastily stopped her. "That was for their own good. It was Cai Lan and your master's

will that I send them out of the Realm of Split Void!”

Pei Qiqi glared directly at him. “Why should I believe you?”

Nie Tian, however, remained as calm as always. Hua Mu had once told him that he could trust Hu Rong completely.

Hu Rong was with the Spirit Condor, where Hua Mu held a lofty position. It seemed that Hu Rong was one of his trusted subordinates. Adding in Hua Mu’s relationship with Zhen Huilan, he wouldn’t possibly harm Li Ye.

“His intentions should be good,” Nie Tian said in a low voice. “He’s Uncle Hua’s guy.”

Hu Rong gave a faint smile and said, “Nie Tian, Master Zhen told me about your identity before she left for the Void Illusion Mountain Range.”

Upon hearing that Hu Rong was Hua Mu’s guy and that he knew about Nie Tian’s identity, Pei Qiqi gradually calmed down. However, she was still curious about the reason behind this. “Tell me why you’re doing this.”

Watching Pei Qiqi’s Ethereal Swords gradually backing away from him, Hu Rong laughed bitterly and said, “A couple of days ago, Cai Lan realized the unfavorable situation they were in, and thus asked me to send his children out of the Realm of Split Void. The turmoil in the Realm of Split Void might still last quite some time. He wasn’t even sure that he would be able to survive it.

“If Cai Yuan and Cai Yue had stayed, they’d become his burden.

“He would be worried about their safety all the time. Therefore, he asked me to do him a favor and send them away.”

After a brief pause, he added, “As for Li Ye, that was your master’s idea. After all, he’s a pure equipment forger. Even though his cultivation base isn’t bad, he’s not built for fierce battles. Your master went to find me before she left for the Void Illusion Mountain Range, telling me that once the situation in Shatter City

worsens, and it's no longer safe for you all to stay, I should send Li Ye away."

Pei Qiqi fell silent. After a moment of pondering, she eventually chose to believe Hu Rong, and then she asked, "What about Nie Tian and me?"

Hu Rong didn't reply right away.

His gaze switched between her and Nie Tian before he said, "Master Zhen said you two should make your own choices. You can chose to leave with Li Ye, or head to the Void Illusion Mountain Range and explore the mysterious dimension within those spatial rifts."

At that moment, Nie Tian joined the conversation by saying, "I know that the Spirit Condor is well-informed. Can you please tell us about the current situation in the whole Realm of Split Void?"

At the same time, Pei Qiqi gazed at him with an inquiring look in her eyes.

Hu Rong's expression grew grim as he said in a depressed voice, "Of course. The Blood Skull's inter-realm teleportation portal was actually the last one to be robbed. Before that, the Dark Moon and the Wild Fire had already lost their teleportation portals to the Ice Pavilion Sect from the Realm of Endless Ice and the Poison Sect from the Realm of Black Marsh."

Nie Tian was taken aback. "What?! The Dark Moon and the Wild Fire's inter-realm teleportation portals were also taken away by force?!"

Hu Rong nodded. "In the eyes of the Thunder Mountain Sect, Ice Pavilion Sect, and Poison Sect, the Blood Skull, the Dark Moon, and the Wild Fire are just puny powers not worth mentioning. The only reason they let them rule over the Realm of Split Void before was because there wasn't anything in the Realm of Split Void that could interest them.

“But now, the situation has changed.

“The dimension those spatial rifts lead to is of great significance. Almost every powerful sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars is intrigued.

“In order to get their powerful experts to the Realm of the Split Void, those sects would have to rely on inter-realm teleportation portals.

“It would be too time-consuming to establish a new one. If they did that, they would have to evaluate the environment, adjust the spell formation, and so on. Clearly, a ready-made one would be optimal.”

After hearing his explanation, Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi both understood the situation.

By controlling an inter-realm teleportation portal, the foreign powers would be able to not only transfer their powerful experts to the Realm of the Split Void, but also stop their rival sects or clans from arriving. Therefore, such a move was actually killing two birds with one stone.

“What’s the situation in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?” Pei Qiqi asked.

Hu Rong let out a sigh and said, “From what we’ve learned, due to the influx of powerful foreign experts, the Dark Moon, the Blood Skull, and the Wild Fire have already stopped fighting each other. Furthermore, the heads of the three forces have all sustained injuries of different degrees. So now, they’ve taken the initiative to back out of the fight over those few spatial rifts.

“There were a total of six spatial rifts. They all lead to the same dimension, but not the same location.

“The Dong Clan from the Realm of a Hundred Battles was the first to act. They joined hands with other powers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles and secured one of the spatial rifts.

Meanwhile, the Heaven Palace Sect has assumed control of one, the Poison Sect controls one, the Ice Pavilion sect controls one, and the Tool Sect controls one.

“Recently, fierce battles broke out in succession between powerful foreign experts over the control of those six spatial rifts.

“Your master fought hard side by side with powerful experts from the Tool Sect, and eventually helped the Tool Sect assume control of that spatial rift. Even still, the situation over there hasn’t cleared up yet. One of the six spatial rifts has still yet to be claimed.

“The reason why the Thunder Mountain Sect from the Realm of Earth Sieve took the Blood Skull’s inter-realm teleportation portal was because they intend to gather their powerful experts, as well as powerful experts from the Heaven Expanse Sect, and occupy that last spatial rift.

“The Yin Sect and the Yang Sect from the Realm of a Thousand Devastations, and the Flame God Sect and the Spirit God Sect from the Realm of Dark Underworld are their primary rivals. It’s still hard to say which side will triumph.

“Anyways, Master Zhen is helping the Tool Sect guard their spatial rift, so she won’t return any time soon.

“So? Do you want to leave the Realm of Split Void or go to the Void Illusion Mountain Range?”

Chapter 481: Rescue

After explaining the situation to them, Hu Rong waited silently for Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi to give their answers.

Nie Tian fell silent.

He hadn't expected that the appearance of the six spatial rifts would actually draw every powerful sect in the Domain of the Falling Stars to the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

Among the nine realms of the Domain of the Falling Stars, the Realm of Flame Heaven was the only one that hadn't sent any forces into the Realm of Split Void.

"Have any Soul realm experts joined the battles in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?" Pei Qiqi asked with a grim expression.

"No," Hu Rong answered. "It seems that all of the major powers have reached a mutual understanding. The strongest experts they've sent to the Realm of the Split Realm are only at the Profound realm. I suppose that's because they plan to get ahold of the situation first. Also, battles between Soul realm experts will be overly devastating. If they come and engage in battle with each other in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, they might end up destroying the entire mountain range.

"Therefore, none of their Soul realm experts are here."

Pei Qiqi let out a sigh of relief and said, "I'm going to the Void Illusion Mountain Range."

Seeing that she had made her decision, Nie Tian grinned and made his stance clear by saying, "Me too."

Hu Rong nodded gently and said, "If you really decide to go, you'll have to leave Shatter City, march through the wasteland and desert where Hunters used to ambush passing explorers, and eventually get to the Void Illusion Mountain Range yourselves."

“Doesn’t the Blood Skull have a functional teleportation portal in the Void Illusion Mountain Range?” Pei Qiqi asked, looking confused. “Can’t we teleport there directly through this portal?”

Hu Rong smiled bitterly and said, “The Blood Skull’s teleportation portal in the Void Illusion Mountain Range is no longer usable. One of the spatial rifts appeared right in the Blood Skull’s base in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. The Poison Sect seized control of that spatial rift along with the Blood Skull’s domestic teleportation portal.

“Cai Lan sustained severe injuries fighting back, and eventually backed out of their base with his men.”

Pei Qiqi’s expression flickered.

Then, Hu Rong let out a helpless sigh and added, “The Blood Skull wasn’t alone. The Wild Fire also lost their domestic teleportation portal to the Heaven Palace Sect. In the eyes of those ancient sects with deeply rooted strength, the Blood Skull, the Wild Fire, and the Dark Moon aren’t even worth mentioning.

“The three of them also fought each other before those truly powerful sects came.

“They did it to gain control of the six spatial rifts, so that they could make deals with the foreign sects afterwards, trading the spatial rifts for cultivation resources.

“However, due to the unequal strength of the sides, they weren’t even given the chance to talk.

“As soon as powerful experts from the other eight realms rushed over, they forcibly took those spatial rifts they were guarding along with their domestic teleportation portals.”

Eyebrows knitted, Nie Tian suddenly began to feel sorry for the Blood Skull. He was used to their imposing manners. Who would have thought that, as powerful experts swarmed in from the other realms, they would become the underdog, being bullied and not

even given the chance to initiate a conversation?

“Li Ye and those two will be safe, right?” Pei Qiqi asked.

“That I can assure you,” Hu Rong answered with a serious expression. “The three of them were sent to one of the Spirit Condor’s secret strongholds. By the time the turmoil in the Realm of Split Void comes to an end, we’ll send them back immediately upon your master’s request.”

“Good.” Pei Qiqi didn’t want to waste more time talking. She shot Nie Tian a glance and said, “Let’s go.”

Nie Tian nodded and followed her out of the secret room.

Hu Rong saw them to the door and said gently, “Take care of yourselves.”

Not a single person could be seen in the lonesome streets as Pei Qiqi and Nie Tian headed directly towards the city gate.

On their way, they could hear the fierce sounds of fighting coming from the nearby blocks.

Even though it was daytime, the situation had apparently gotten out of hand in Shatter City. Since the Blood Skull’s remaining forces weren’t able to keep order, they turned a blind eye to all the fights and killings.

As the two of them reached the city gate, they found, to their surprise, that it wasn’t guarded by Blood Skull members like it used to be, and that the usually-closed gate was now wide open.

Many cultivators feared for their safety in Shatter City, and thus left in droves.

They would bear the impure and toxic spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth outside rather than stay inside the increasingly dangerous Shatter City.

Nie Tian took out his green jade bracelet and activated it, and he was instantly enveloped by a shield of spiritual power. Afterwards,

he followed Pei Qiqi out of the city and towards the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

From time to time, wandering cultivators could be seen in the vast and open wasteland. Most of them didn't seem to have clear destinations, and only wanted to get away from Shatter City, which was now rife with danger.

Strangely, they didn't encounter any of the Hunters that normally would ambush travelers in the wasteland. It was uncertain if they had been wiped out by powerful foreign experts, or if they had seen through the trend and thus holed up somewhere.

Nie Tian unleashed his Heaven Eyes as he dashed through the wasteland with Pei Qiqi.

He saw a large number of dead cultivators through his Heaven Eyes along the way.

Most of them had lived in Shatter City, and left after things in the city started to go south.

However, it was unknown who had killed them, pillaged their bodies clean, and left them to rot in the wasteland.

A number of the dead seemed to be Hunters, some of whom had even joined in his pursuit once.

One night, Nie Tian came to a stop in front of a dozen dead bodies. Looking at the scorpion patterns on their chests, Nie Tian said to Pei Qiqi, "It seems that someone has wiped out the Scorpion."

Pei Qiqi took a brief glance at the bodies and said, "This is probably the doing of someone from the Thunder Mountain Sect. All of them are charred. Apparently, they were bombarded to death by lightning magics. Perhaps powerful experts from the Thunder Mountain Sect were waiting here when Lei Yao took that inter-realm teleportation portal from the Blood Skull. They sensed

the existence of the Scorpion members in this area. Since they had nothing else to do, they killed them and took their valuables.”

Since the Scorpion had chased after Nie Tian upon Dong Li’s orders before, he had sworn to himself that, once he became strong enough, he would kill each and every one of them. However, they had already been wiped out before he could make good on his promise.

Staring at the corpses scattered before him, Nie Tian didn’t feel the slightest joy of revenge. Instead, he looked very grim as he asked, “Why would the people from the Thunder Mountain Sect kill them?”

“Perhaps they needed spirit stones, or perhaps they were just bored. There could be many reasons.” Pei Qiqi answered with an expressionless face. “They had no problem robbing the Blood Skull, not to mention these puny Hunters. In the eyes of the powerful experts from the other realms, Qi warriors who live in the Realm of Split Void are nothing more than a pack of dogs that have lost their homes.

“After all, only those who couldn’t make a living in the other realms or wanted to escape from enemies would come to the Realm of Split Void, where birds don’t defecate and hens don’t lay eggs. (Idiom: remote and desolate)

“Strong sects like the Heaven Palace Sect and the Thunder Mountain Sect have always despised the Qi warriors who live in the Realm of Split Void. Now that they’re here, they can kill whoever they want. It’s not like someone will step forward and preside over justice for the local Qi warriors.”

A grim look filled Nie Tian’s eyes as he nodded and said, “I see.”

Afterward, the two of them resumed their march. It wasn’t long before they passed through the wasteland and entered the desert, where sand dunes stretched as far as the eye could see.

As they did, Nie Tian discovered more and more corpses via his Heaven Eyes. He even saw via his Heaven Eyes that a few Thunder Mountain Sect Qi warriors were chasing after groups of Hunters, their faces completely expressionless. Apparently, they were after their valuables.

Luckily for Nie Tian, those Qi warriors from the Thunder Mountain Sect weren't powerful enough to sense the existence of his Heaven Eyes.

After he described the situation to Pei Qiqi, she told him to stay out of it. Therefore, they steered clear of them, and marched towards the Void Illusion Mountain Range at full speed.

A few more days passed.

As the two of them came very close to the Void Illusion Mountain Range, Nie Tian caught sight of an old acquaintance via one of his Heaven Eyes: Shi Qing from the Blood Skull.

He seemed to have come from the Void Illusion Mountain Range, and was heading towards Shatter City, yet he was covered in blood.

A few hundred meters behind him, a Qi warrior from the Thunder Mountain Sect was following him, seemingly unhurried. He even ridiculed Shi Qing by saying, "Where are you going? Shatter City?"

Shi Qing didn't respond, but instead focused on hastening forward.

Nie Tian suddenly came to a stop and said, "I saw Shi Qing from the Blood Skull. He's being pursued by a member of the Thunder Mountain Sect. I don't think it'll be long before the man gets him. What's your opinion?"

"Shi Qing..." Pei Qiqi muttered. After a moment of hesitation, she asked, "That Thunder Mountain Sect disciple chasing after him. What's his cultivation base?"

“The late Greater Heaven stage,” Nie Tian answered.

“Shi Qing is at the middle Greater Heaven stage. No wonder he’s losing.” Pei Qiqi pondered for a few seconds, then continued, “If we help him, we need to make sure that we can finish that Thunder Mountain Sect disciple off before he he can send out a message. It has to be a clean kill. If he somehow sends out a message and draws powerful Thunder Mountain Sect experts to this place, we’ll be in a lot of trouble.”

“Do we rescue him or not?!” Nie Tian exclaimed softly.

“Your decision,” Pei Qiqi said, expressionless.

“What the hell! They’re right ahead. I’ll go and ambush that man!” With these words, Nie Tian burst into a cluster of blinding starlight and vanished in a split second.

Chapter 482: Expelling Order

The sun hung high in the sky, scorching the desert.

Nie Tian hid in a sand dune and masked all of his life aura with the Life Stealth bloodline talent.

He left a shred of his garment on the sand dune, making it fairly easy to notice.

Then, he spread his Heaven Eyes in the vicinity, keeping a close watch on Shi Qing and the man pursuing him.

Hiding in the sand dune, Nie Tian gripped his Flame Star tightly, strong killing intent filling his heart. “The Thunder Mountain Sect from the Realm of Earth Sieve...”

Even if Lei Yao hadn’t so openly robbed the Blood Skull of their inter-realm teleportation portal in Shatter City, he still wouldn’t have had any good feelings for the Thunder Mountain Sect.

He still vividly remembered what the young man from the Realm of Earth Sieve had said right before entering the Heaven Gate that had appeared by the Hell Sect.

Back then, the Realm of Earth Sieve, the Realm of Dark Underworld, and the Realm of Black Marsh had all sent their most talented youngsters to the Realm of Flame Heaven, where they could enter the Heaven Gate and participate in the trial.

Right before they had entered, they had arrogantly revealed that their realms had already reached a mutual understanding to carve up the Realm of Flame Heaven.

If the Demons had failed to kill everyone in the Realm of Flame Heaven after the Heaven Gate trial was over, then they would invade the Realm of Flame Heaven themselves. They had even agreed on how to divide the Realm of Flame Heaven.

Meanwhile, during the Heaven Gate trial, Qi warriors from those

three realms had specifically chased and slaughtered participants from the Realm of Flame Heaven.

Nie Tian had never forgotten about those old grudges. Hence, his enmity towards the sects in those three realms had always been there.

Recently, he had witnessed the Thunder Mountain Sect openly rob the Blood Skull's inter-realm teleportation portal.

He had witnessed powerful experts from the Thunder Mountain Sect slaughtering Hunters and Qi warriors from Shatter City more than a few times on his way to this place.

Killing intent had long since been brooding in his heart.

However, he hadn't expected that he would catch a Qi warrior from the Thunder Mountain Sect chasing after Shi Qing now that he was about to reach the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

Before, Shi Qing had treated him fairly in Shatter City. Seeing that he was being chased by a Thunder Mountain Sect disciple, Nie Tian couldn't hold it any longer.

He secretly gathered his strength, hiding in the sand dune.

Moments later, Shi Qing trudged into the area where he was hiding, soaked in blood.

BANG!

The pursuing Thunder Mountain Sect disciple occasionally shot bolts of cyan lighting out of his fingertips. Despite Shi Qing moving about to avoid them, some of them bombarded his back, making him look even more miserable.

The man sneered, looking very relaxed. "You can't get away," he said. It was as if he was enjoying this so much that he still wanted to play with Shi Qing for a little longer.

Via his Heaven Eyes, Nie Tian saw that Shi Qing wasn't heading towards the sand dune where he was hiding.

Therefore, he manipulated one of his Heaven Eyes to quietly float towards Shi Qing, and at the same time, sent a wisp of his awareness into that Heaven Eye.

Blood kept flowing out of the wounds on Shi Qing's charred back, and his eyes were bloodshot.

In his eyes, the whole world seemed to be painted with blood, and was dark-red.

At this moment, the only thought in his head was to run as fast as he could. Perhaps he still had a chance of making it back to Shatter City.

Another bolt of lightning struck his back, causing blood to spill from his mouth. Staggering, he didn't dare to turn to look back. He struggled to summon his last remaining spiritual power and trudge forward.

At that moment, a strange wisp of a message seemed to echo out by his ears, "This is Hua Tian. Run past the sand dune that has a piece of cloth on it, and I'll sneak an attack on that Thunder Mountain Sect disciple from under the sand!"

"Hua Tian!" Shi Qing's eyes, which had been painted red by blood, suddenly lit up.

He didn't know how Hua Tian had gotten that clear message through to him.

He also wondered why Hua Tian would appear in this region after being gone for so long.

However, desperate as he was now, Nie Tian's message came as a silver lining in complete darkness. No matter what, he had to hold on to it.

Therefore, without any delay, he followed the directions Nie Tian had given him and ran toward the sand dune with a piece of cloth on it.

In the scorching sunlight, blood dripped onto the sand from Shi Qing's back as he climbed over that sand dune. However, he didn't stop, but instead kept rushing forward without the slightest hesitation.

He didn't even look back, yet his heart was filled with hope.

He was one of the few Blood Skull members who had personally witnessed Nie Tian's formidable battle prowess, and knew that he had worked miracles and killed Greater Heaven stage opponents before.

However, the Thunder Mountain Sect disciple who was chasing after him was at the late Greater Heaven stage.

Therefore, he slightly doubted that Nie Tian would be able to achieve good results by launching a sneak attack on his pursuer.

"Your head, Cai Lan, didn't know his place," The Thunder Mountain Sect pursuer said with a sinister grin. "We've long since issued an order for irrelevant organizations and personnel to evacuate from the region, yet he still dared to stay. He has only himself to blame. I can't believe that organizations like the Blood Skull even dared to come to the Void Illusion Mountain Range and compete with us. You deserve to be annihilated."

Taunting unceasingly, the man adjusted his direction and headed straight towards the slightly raised sand dune.

BANG!

The sand dune exploded, sending sand flying in all directions. A long saber, which exuded green, white, and red auras, suddenly thrust out from underneath the sand.

At the same time, a chaotic magnetic field was instantly formed, enveloping the man.

PHOOH!

The Flame Star's sharp blade pierced into the man's abdomen,

causing him to let out an ear-piercing cry.

Immediately afterwards, countless tiny lightning bolts appeared around the man's abdomen, desperately resisting the three types of power the Flame Star was exuding.

Nie Tian, who was still partially covered in sand, formed a small star formation in his other palm, the look in his eyes fierce like a cold blade. Without any hesitation, he pressed his starlight-glittering palm on the man's left leg.

Bombarded by the mysterious formation composed of starsparks, the man's left leg instantly shattered and exploded.

The violent impact sent the man into midair with the Flame Star in his abdomen.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

At that moment, Pei Qiqi's Ethereal Swords suddenly appeared, as if they had suddenly descended upon the real world from the unknown void.

Before the man could react, they pierced into his lower back, right leg, chest, and abdomen.

RUUUUMBLE!

A loud roll of thunder echoed out from within the man. As he struggled to swing his arms at Nie Tian, the countless lightning bolts on him converged into a lightning ball which flew directly towards Nie Tian.

As it did, Nie Tian cast a short-range Starshift and appeared right before him like a ghost.

"I can't believe that didn't kill you!" With these words, he grabbed the hilt of the Flame Star and buried it deeper into the man's belly.

The tip of the Flame Star immediately came out of the man's back. As he fell uncontrollably from midair, Nie Tian threw a

vigorous kick at the top of the man's head.

CRUNCH!

The sound of bone cracking echoed out. The man stopped breathing before he hit the sand.

Landing next to him with a loud boom, Nie Tian pulled the Flame Star out of him and swung it a few times to get rid of the blood on the blade.

WHOOSH!

Pei Qiqi flashed into appearance beside Nie Tian. With a subtle move of her slender, jade-like fingers, her Ethereal Swords flew out of the corpse and disappeared into her cuff.

Nie Tian took off the mask Zhen Huilan had given him as he walked over to Shi Qing, who was resting nearby, and said, "Long time no see, Uncle Shi."

Covered in blood, Shi Qing's bewildered gaze switched back and forth between Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi before he asked, "Hua Tian, Miss Pei, why are you here?"

Pei Qiqi didn't respond, but rather walked to the dead Thunder Mountain Sect disciple's side with a disgusted expression. She took the man's ring of holding, buried him in sand, and erased all traces of his presence.

"We were on our way to the Void Illusion Mountain Range when we saw you being chased by that man, so we came to help you," Nie Tian answered.

"The Void Illusion Mountain Range..." Shi Qing took out a handful of medicinal pills and stuffed them down his throat. Wiping the blood on his face with a handkerchief, he continued, "Listen to me and go back. The Thunder Mountain Sect has issued an order for all members of the Blood Skull, the Wild Fire, and the Dark Moon to leave the Void Illusion Mountain Range."

Eyebrows furrowed, Nie Tian asked, “Is the Thunder Mountain Sect the only one that has issued such an order?”

“It seems that all of the foreign powers have reached a mutual understanding, and they’re driving local Qi warriors out of the mountain range simultaneously.” Shi Qing forced a smile and added, “In their eyes, the Blood Skull, the Dark Moon, and the Wild Fire are nothing but lambs waiting to be put to the knife. At first, we fought among ourselves for the rights to those six spatial rifts. We each lost many brothers and sisters, hoping to make deals with foreign powers when they come.

“Who would have known that, when they actually came, they didn’t even give us the chance to negotiate?”

“Hua Tian, Miss Pei, I strongly suggest you go back and leave the Realm of Split Void as soon as possible. Even if you have to stay in the Realm of Split Void, don’t ever get anywhere near the Void Illusion Mountain Range. It’s already become hell on earth over there.”

After properly disposing of the Thunder Mountain Sect disciple’s body, Pei Qiqi came to Nie Tian and Shi Qing’s side and said, “It’s the same with Shatter City. I don’t think you want to go back there.”

“I kinda guessed it,” Shi Qing said with dried-up bloodstains on his face, looking to be in extremely sore straits. “I suspected what would happen after I heard that the Thunder Mountain Sect seized our inter-realm teleportation portal. Everything is out of control! Everything is chaotic! The current Realm of Split Void is no longer a place where powers like the Blood Skull can rule.”

Pei Qiqi took a glance at Shi Qing and said, “Where is the spatial rift that’s controlled by the Tool Sect? How can we get there without running into people from the Thunder Mountain Sect?” With these words, she took out a map and unfurled it before Shi Qing.

After a brief pondering, Shi Qing drew a route on the map and said, “Follow this route.”

“Okay, you take care. Shatter City isn’t worth returning to anymore, and wherever you go, watch out for powerful experts from the Thunder Mountain Sect.” With these reminders, Pei Qiqi gave Nie Tian a look, signaling that it was time to leave.

Chapter 483: Two Choices

After bidding farewell to Shi Qing, Nie Tian once again put on the mask which came with the identity 'Mu Han'. After they were a significant distance from Shi Qing, he said, "I doubt that he'll be able to make it back to Shatter City alive."

Without slowing down, Pei Qiqi, who was leading the way in the front, said with a plain tone, "I know."

"So..." Nie Tian wished to speak, but stopped on second thought.

If they had stayed and protected Shi Qing as he spent some time to recover, he would probably have an easier time on his journey back. Even if he were to encounter other Qi warriors from the Thunder Mountain Sect, he might still have a chance at escaping.

However, Pei Qiqi hadn't shown the slightest intention to stay any longer. She had taken Nie Tian and left soon after they had taken care of the Thunder Mountain Sect pursuer.

All of a sudden, Pei Qiqi came to a stop.

After Nie Tian stopped beside her, she said, "This place is very close to the Void Illusion Mountain Range. There may be more Thunder Mountain Sect Qi warriors in the vicinity. I don't think that man's death will remain a secret for very long. If people from the Thunder Mountain Sect come to search for him, and find us with Shi Qing, they'll probably uncover the truth and hold us accountable."

"So you're worried that we would have gotten into trouble if we didn't leave?" Nie Tian asked, his eyes narrowed.

"Yeah," Pei Qiqi admitted her real thoughts without hiding anything. "That man was at the late Greater Heaven stage, and we only managed to kill him so quickly because you snuck up on him. If we had fought him fairly, you, Shi Qing, and I might still have been able to kill him, but we wouldn't have been able to stop him

from sending messages to others.

“We might have managed to kill him, but those that the Thunder Mountain Sect would send after us might be Worldly realm experts.

“Even if we team up, we won’t stand a chance fighting a Worldly realm expert from the Thunder Mountain Sect.”

Nie Tian fell silent. A while later, he said, “You’re very rational.”

“Now, lots of people die every day. We can’t afford to care too much about them.” Pei Qiqi’s eyebrows didn’t move in the slightest as she spoke. “I only care about my master and Li Ye’s safety. I won’t concern myself with any others’ wellbeing.”

“What about me?” Nie Tian suddenly asked. “What if I was being chased by people from the Thunder Mountain Sect, and you happened to see me?”

Pei Qiqi’s cold eyes glittered as she bowed her head slightly, as if she was contemplating. A moment later, she said, “I’d come to your aid if I believed that I had a good chance of saving you. If your pursuer was at the Worldly realm or even the Profound realm, I’d probably give up, and avenge you when I’m strong enough.”

Nie Tian smiled heartily and said, “Well, if you’re surrounded by enemies, no matter who they are or what their cultivation bases are, I’ll rush to your side and fight with you. If worst comes to worst, I’ll die. Big deal.”

Upon hearing these words, Pei Qiqi’s slender body shuddered slightly.

Apparently, Nie Tian’s words had created waves in her heart. However, she rapidly calmed herself and said, “Well, enough talking. We need to be extra careful from now on, and try not to come into contact with people from the Thunder Mountain Sect or powerful experts from the other sects as well. Our destination is the spatial rift controlled by the Tool Sect.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Okay.”

Afterwards, under Pei Qiqi’s leadership, they repeatedly adjusted their path as they approached the Void Illusion Mountain Range and the spatial rift guarded by Tool Sect experts.

As they did, Nie Tian scanned their surroundings with his Heaven Eyes and instructed Pei Qiqi to stay as far away from foreign experts as possible.

One night...

The two of them finally reached the edge of the Void Illusion Mountain Range after meticulously steering clear of group after group of powerful foreign experts.

At that moment, vague sounds suddenly echoed out from within one of Nie Tian’s Sound Stones.

Under the night sky, he took out the Sound Stone, and realized that it was the Sound Stone Dong Baijie had given him, which supposedly would allow them to communicate with each other within a 250 kilometer range.

He sent a wisp of psychic awareness into the Sound Stone and immediately received a message from Dong Li.

At the same time, Pei Qiqi took out her Sound Stone and frowned as she held it close to her ear. Clearly, someone had contacted her as well.

The message from Dong Li was clear, and Nie Tian could tell that she was filled with excitement. She asked him where he was and informed him of the current situation.

According to her, the powerful experts from the other eight realms had already started clearing the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

All of the local Qi warriors, including the members of the Blood Skull, the Dark Moon, and the Wild Fire, had been expelled from

the mountain range.

She also told him that the major powers from the Realm of a Hundred Battles had teamed up and assumed control of one of the spatial rifts.

Aside from the spatial rift controlled by the Heaven Palace Sect, theirs was the most heavily guarded, almost impregnable.

However, even though the Tool Sect was currently controlling a spatial rift, their defenses seemed fragile now that the Yin Sect, the Yang Sect, the Flame God Sect, and the Spirit God Sect had also come to the mountain range.

Dong Li also told her that Wu Ling was among those who the Tool Sect had planned to send into the spatial rift. If he went into the spatial rift with Tool Sect disciples, Wu Ling might discover his actual identity and seek trouble with him.

She did everything she could to persuade him to go through the spatial rift controlled by the Realm of a Hundred Battles with her and other members of the Dong Clan.

She even told him that, as long as he agreed to join them, she would come to pick him up from his current location with a Profound realm Dong Clan expert, and escort him safely to their spatial rift.

Holding the Sound Stone, Nie Tian frowned as he pondered in silence.

Moments later, Pei Qiqi put away her Sound Stone and asked Nie Tian with a puzzled expression, “Who were you talking to?”

“Dong Li,” Nie Tian said, looking somewhat embarrassed.

Pei Qiqi’s face dropped. “She’s also in the Void Illusion Mountain Range? What did she say?”

“She told me that Wu Ling is there with the Tool Sect experts, and also that the spatial rift controlled by the Tool Sect doesn’t

seem impregnable,” Nie Tian said without holding anything back. “She also said that the Tool Sect is in actually a vulnerable place now that Zhao Shanling is still somewhere out there. Seeing that, powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect, the Flame God Sect, the Yin Sect, and the Yang Sect might come to take the Tool Sect’s spatial rift. So... she invited me to go to join her.”

Pei Qiqi’s bright eyes shone with frosty light as she stared directly into Nie Tian’s eyes and asked, “So what did you tell her?”

Nie Tian scratched his head. “I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

“I forbid you to go to join those from the Dong Clan!” Pei Qiqi’s tone suddenly grew unprecedentedly strong.

Looking into her cold eyes, where she attempted to hide her anger, Nie Tian was shocked.

Having spent such a long time with her, Nie Tian had rarely seen her get angry. After a brief silence, he nodded slowly and said, “Alright, I’ll tell her no.”

With these words, he sent Dong Li a message, telling her that it was an arrangement made by a senior of his, so he had to go with Zhen Huilan and Pei Qiqi.

Immediately after sending the message to Dong Li via that Sound Stone, he sensed Dong Li’s rage.

He hastily ended his connection with Dong Li, not wanting to hear her grumbling.

“From now on, avoid contact with that woman as much as you can.” Pei Qiqi let out a cold harrumph. “God knows how many men who were attracted by her looks died because of her. Don’t you remember how she summoned other Hunter organizations to chase you in the desert and the wasteland? The woman is very good at manipulating men who want her into doing things for her. I hope you don’t get fooled.”

Nie Tian gave a dry smile.

After a moment of silence, Pei Qiqi added, “My master is on her way here. She’ll take us to our destination. Don’t you worry. Also, you don’t have to worry about Wu Ling. You’ll just use the name ‘Mu Han’. He won’t be able to recognize you. Even if he does, will you be scared of him?”

Provoked by her words, Nie Tian laughed heartily and said, “Alright, I’ve already told you that I’ll go with you and join those from the Tool Sect.”

...

In the Void Illusion Mountain Range...

A number of powerful experts from the Realm of a Hundred Battles were standing by a spatial rift. They all had serious expressions on their faces, as if they were waiting for something.

Not wearing any mask, Dong Li’s gorgeous face was filled with anger and grouchiness. She suddenly turned to Gu Haofeng, who was trying to please and woo her, and yelled, “Would you shut your mouth, Gu Haofeng?!”

Strange expressions appeared on the faces of Qin Yan, Cao Qiushui, Qian Xin, and the other juniors.

Just now, Dong Li had seemed fine, and was talking with them about their plans after arriving on the other side of the spatial rift.

Then, she had taken out her Sound Stone and talked to someone. After that, she suddenly grew angry, and then lashed out at Gu Haofeng. Everyone was rather confused.

Feeling wronged, Gu Haofeng asked with an embarrassed expression, “Why are you mad at me, Li? What did I do?”

“You talked to me! Your voice is irritating!” Dong Li’s appealing body moved lightly as she ran towards Dong Baijie, who was sitting with his back against a huge rock and drinking at a slow pace.

Dong Baijie set his alcohol bottle on the ground before smiling at

her and asking, “What’s wrong? Who made you angry? Tell me, and I’ll go teach him a lesson right now.”

Dong Li lowered her voice and said angrily, “You know exactly who it was! That bastard refused to join us!”

The Sound Stone Nie Tian had used to communicate with Dong Li was a gift from Dong Baijie, so he naturally knew Dong Li had been talking to Nie Tian.

“That’s alright,” Dong Baijie comforted her in a low voice. “We’ll have plenty of chances to meet on the other side. There’s no rush.

Dong Li couldn’t get over it as she said, “It’s hard to say if the Tool Sect will be able to guard their spatial rift, and his enemy Wu Ling is also going to be there. Joining us is clearly the better choice. Our team is going to be the most powerful one to enter that strange dimension, but he insisted on joining those from the Tool Sect. His head must have been kicked by a mule!” (Slang: not very smart)

Looking at his younger sister, who was still furious, Dong Baijie burst into laughter and asked, “You’re angry because he chose Pei Qiqi, aren’t you?”

“What?! No!” Dong Li rolled her eyes at her older brother. “I’m just angry because he made a dumb decision, taking a risk, while there’s clearly a safer choice.”

“Hahaha!” Dong Baijie laughed but didn’t say a word.

Under his meaningful gaze, Dong Li grew somewhat self-conscious, and mumbled bashfully, “You’re thinking too much. It’s not like that.” Afterwards, she ran away from Dong Baijie, kicking rubble into pieces as a way to vent her anger.

Chapter 484: A Gift

About a quarter hour later...

A spatial portal suddenly appeared out of thin air before Nie Tian.

Zhen Huilan came through it, stood in front of Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi, and said, “You’ve decided to come.”

“Master.”

“Senior Zhen.”

Zhen Huilan waved at Nie Tian, signaling him not to stand on ceremony. “The environment in the Realm of Split Void is very different from the other realms, and the spatial energy fluctuations in the Void Illusion Mountain Range are far too strong. So, even I couldn’t create a long-distance spatial tunnel and pick you up directly from Shatter City.

“This is as far as my spatial tunnel can reach.”

With these words, a huge, prismatic, fiery crystal flew out from within her ring of holding. She presented it to Nie Tian and said with a solemn expression, “Place this fiery crystal close to the Flame Dragon Armor. The Flame Dragon Armor is a Spirit Channeling grade treasure. It’ll know what to do.”

With a puzzled expression, Nie Tian held the crystal with two hands, and instead of putting it directly into his ring of holding, he examined it carefully.

The prismatic, fiery crystal was red throughout, and the size of a grown man.

Streaks of flames could be seen flowing within it, as if there were rivers of fire sealed within the crystal. An extremely strong fire aura could be sensed from the crystal.

As soon as he placed his hand on it, his vortex of flame power

started to spin madly, as if it were stimulated by the fiery crystal and desired to absorb the flame power within the crystal to its capacity.

“What is this?!” Nie Tian asked, looking astonished.

“This fiery crystal isn’t some precious fire-attributed material,” Zhen Huilan said with a plain tone. “However, the things inside it are very rare and precious. The streaks of flames swimming about within it are earthflame essence. I believe it can help the Flame Dragon Armor recover its strength.”

“Earthflame essence?!” Nie Tian exclaimed.

“Hua Mu, that old thing, told me that your Flame Dragon Armor needs earthflame essence, so I gathered some for you,” Zhen Huilan said with a faint smile. “Compared to what you’ve found for him, this is nothing. Earthflame essence exists in many fiery dimensions. The gathering part isn’t hard at all. What’s hard is finding such fiery dimensions.

“The Flame God Sect couldn’t find such fiery dimensions because they don’t have profound, deep-rooted power. However, I’m well-versed in spatial magics, and spend a big part of my time in the Void Illusion Mountain Range, so I can find some. It’s not that big a deal.”

“Many thanks, Senior Zhen!!” Nie Tian bowed respectfully before putting the prismatic, fiery crystal into his ring of holding and placing it right next to the Flame Dragon Armor.

As soon as the sizable crystal flew into the ring of holding, the Blood Core on the Flame Dragon Armor started to shine with bright, fiery light.

The moment it was placed next to the Flame Dragon Armor, countless thin flames shot out from within the Blood Core.

Like channels, they connected the Flame Dragon Armor and the large fiery crystal. Without any delay, the Flame Dragon Armor

started absorbing the earthflame essence within the crystal.

Under Nie Tian's gaze, one of the streaks of flames sealed within the crystal rapidly grew dim, as if it were being quickly drained of flame power.

“Master, is Wu Ling there with the other Tool Sect experts?” Pei Qiqi asked in a low voice.

Upon hearing her words, Nie Tian snapped back to reality and looked curiously at Zhen Huilan, no longer paying any attention to what was happening within his ring of holding.

He had learned from Dong Li that they had not only transferred Worldly and Profound realm experts from the Realm of a Hundred Battles to the Void Illusion Mountain Range, but also many Greater Heaven stage youngsters.

It went without saying that the dimension those spatial rifts led to would be full of danger, and that bloody battles might break out at any moment.

Therefore, he wondered why they would bring Greater Heaven stage youngsters. Wouldn't they become burdens to others?

“Yes, he is,” Zhen Huilan said. “There are a variety of strange regions in the dimension within those spatial rifts. Some of the regions seem to be subject to some sort of mandate of heaven and earth. Those whose cultivation bases are too high will be rejected from entering. If they attempt to enter by force, they'll be instantly be annihilated by the mysterious law of heaven and earth.

“However, precious spiritual materials that could help experts advance to the Void domain might still exist in those regions.

“In order to explore those special regions, they have to bring Greater Heaven stage youngsters. Otherwise, how do they expect to search for precious treasures in those regions if they can't even enter them?

“That’s why those sects from the other eight realms have arranged for their Greater Heaven stage disciples to come as well.

“Only in this way will they be able to conduct a thorough search of every region in that mysterious dimension without missing out on anything.”

After hearing her explanation, both Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi understood the reason behind those foreign sects’ decisions.

Zhen Huilan pointed at the portal she had created out of thin air and said, “Alright, let’s go. Nie Tian, your identity is very special, so try not to get exposed. Of course the Tool Sect won’t do anything to you as long as I’m around. However, I’m just afraid that some of them might leak the information, and draw the Heaven Palace Sect’s and the Flame God Sect’s attention.”

Nie Tian nodded. “Okay, I’ll try to be careful.”

Afterwards, the three of them followed each other into the spatial tunnel that led to the depths of the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

In a dense forest...

After flying out of the spatial tunnel, Nie Tian glanced around and found, to his surprise, that this was none other than the forest where Dong Li and her Fang members had ambushed explorers before.

This didn’t seem to be the deepest part of the dense forest. A dozen dead spirit beasts were scattered in the vicinity, which seemed to have been slaughtered by powerful experts from the Tool Sect.

At the same time, he saw Zhu Lian, who he had met once in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, and Bai Yu, who was an elder of the Tool Sect and Wu Ling’s mother.

The late Profound realm Zhu Lian, middle Profound realm Bai Yu, and late Profound realm Zhen Huilan were the most powerful

members on the Tool Sect's team.

There were also seven Worldly realm experts on the team. At this moment, they were gathered in one place and discussing in low voices.

Bai Yu was a rather small woman with a young, graceful appearance. As soon as she saw Zhen Huilan come over with Pei Qiqi and Nie Tian behind her, she asked, "Who's this, senior martial sister?"

She had thought Zhen Huilan had gone to pick up Pei Qiqi and Li Ye.

"This is Mu Han. He's the child of an old friend," Zhen Huilan explained, smiling. "Even though Li Ye's equipment forging talent is unquestionable, he's not a fighter. If he came, not only would he not be able to help, but I'd even have to spare my attention to keep an eye on him. So I arranged for him to go somewhere else."

Bai Yu nodded with a smile. "I see. Okay, why don't we let the juniors talk and get to know each other? After all, they'll need to work together and fight side by side after arriving in that dimension."

Zhen Huilan nodded. "Good idea."

Then, she turned around and nodded at Pei Qiqi and Nie Tian.

Hence, the two of them walked towards the location where Wu Ling, Huang Yuan, Zhu Han, and four other Tool Sect youngsters were gathered.

Even though those four unfamiliar-looking youngsters didn't seem to have powerful backgrounds like Wu Ling, Huang Yuan, or Zhu Han, they were all at the late Greater Heaven stage, and their battle prowess appeared to be outstanding. They must be here to assist Wu Ling and the others.

Upon seeing Pei Qiqi, Zhu Han's eyes instantly lit up. Face full of flattering smiles, he said, "We meet again, Junior Martial Sister

Pei. We'll fight side by side from now on. I'll have your back in that mysterious dimension."

"Greetings, Big Sister Pei," Huang Yuan said with a bright smile.

With an expressionless face, Pei Qiqi walked over with Nie Tian and sat down beside the Tool Sect youngsters. Apparently, she wasn't interested in talking with any of them.

However, Nie Tian's gaze switched among the dead spirit beasts in the vicinity as they walked towards the Tool Sect youngsters.

He found that they were mostly third and fourth grade spirit beasts, but there was a fifth grade spirit beast among them.

Since all of the spirit beasts in the Realm of Split Void had mutated because of the impure spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth, their flesh and blood was completely worthless, and thus they had been left there to rot.

However, their bones, eyes, teeth, and other parts that could be used to forge spiritual tools had all been cut off.

"Spirit beasts..." Nie Tian thought to himself. Even though these spirit beasts' flesh and blood were completely useless to the others, he could absorb the flesh power that remained in them with Life Drain.

It was just that he was afraid that, if he openly took away the remains of those spirit beasts, the Tool Sect members might suspect his intentions.

Therefore, he was torn with indecision.

At that moment, Wu Ling, who had remained silent the whole time, asked Nie Tian, looking into his eyes, "Have we met before?"

Nie Tian snapped to his senses, took a look at Wu Ling, and said, "I don't think so."

Somewhat suspicious, Wu Ling kept staring at him as he searched in his head.

For some reason, as Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi had walked towards them earlier, his attention had been instantly attracted to Nie Tian, instead of Pei Qiqi, who possessed a higher cultivation base and a loftier status.

Chapter 485: Joining Hands

Wu Ling observed Nie Tian for a while longer as he continued to search in his head. However, since he couldn't locate any memory about Mu Han, he could only give up.

Over the following two days, Nie Tian stayed quietly with the Tool Sect juniors and practiced cultivation with fire-attributed materials whenever he could.

After observing and listening for two days, he had learned that the spatial rift wasn't quite stable yet.

If they forcibly entered the spatial rift before it stabilized completely, they would be most likely be carried to some isolated space mix-up zone by the intense and disorderly spatial energy turbulence.

According to the information the Tool Sect had obtained, many of the people who had entered the six spatial rifts as soon as they had appeared had been sent to unknown places, their survival uncertain.

As time passed, the six spatial rifts were gradually becoming more and more stable.

Every now and then, Zhen Huilan would unleash a wisp of her soul awareness to examine the spatial rift. Today, she told everyone that the spatial rift would be fully stable in about ten days. There should be no mishaps if they entered then.

Hence, everyone waited.

During that time, Pei Qiqi observed the spatial rift day and night, trying to derive enlightenment from it with her unique methods.

At first, Nie Tian had spent most of his time practicing cultivation, turning a blind eye to the remains of the spirit beasts.

Just like Pei Qiqi, he wasn't interested in communicating with

the Tool Sect juniors.

Meanwhile, Zhu Han, who had originally harbored the intention of playing up to Pei Qiqi, dropped the idea after encountering that setback.

Another day went by, and Nie Tian finally failed to resist the temptation and rose to his feet when everyone else was practicing cultivation. He stepped over to the remains of the spirit beasts and stored the pieces of discarded meat into his ring of holding.

His action soon caught the attention of Bai Yu, Zhu Lian, and the other Tool Sect experts. However, they only shot him a brief glance and didn't say anything.

The dozen spirit beasts had laid under the blazing sun for days. The only ones that remained unspoiled were the few fourth grade and fifth grade spirit beasts.

After storing them into his ring of holding, Nie Tian quietly returned to Pei Qiqi's side.

As soon as he sat down, Huang Yuan asked with a sweet smile, "What do you plan to do with all that spirit beast meat, Big Brother Mu Han?"

Nie Tian, who had already had an excuse prepared, answered with a casual tone, "I'm raising a few spirit beasts back home. I just wanna take the meat back and see if I can feed them with it."

Huang Yuan didn't know that he was actually lying, and thus said with a serious face, "They probably won't eat it. I've heard that these spirit beasts were poisoned by the atmosphere in the Realm of Split Void. Not only can we not eat them, but neither can spirit beasts from the other realms."

Smiling, Nie Tian explained, "The spirit beasts I'm raising at home are special. Perhaps they will eat it. I'll have to try to see."

"Oh, really? Where are you from, big brother?" Huang Yuan asked, curious.

“The Realm of Flame Heaven,” Nie Tian answered.

Huang Yuan’s eyebrows furrowed. “The Realm of Flame Heaven... That’s the only realm I haven’t been to. I heard that there aren’t any powerful sects or Soul realm experts in that realm. Also, it’s said that a few other realms are planning to seize the Realm of Flame Heaven for their own.”

At that moment, Zhu Han jumped in and said, his face filled with disdain, “Hahaha! I wondered which powerful realm you’re from. Who would have thought that you’re from the Realm of Flame Heaven? That place is...” He clicked his tongue as he looked at Nie Tian, contempt filling his eyes.

Without waiting for him to finish, Nie Tian withdrew from the conversation. Without saying a word, he took out another Flame Crystal, closed his eyes, and started practicing cultivation.

Soon, the day passed, and night descended.

Nie Tian suddenly awoke from his cultivation.

SHEW!

A man flashed into appearance and floated by the spatial rift, which was right above the dense forest.

Zhen Huilan, Bai Yu, and Zhu Lian had all been practicing cultivation.

The sudden arrival of that man instantly caught their attention.

Nie Tian and the other juniors also turned to see who it was, their expressions grim and nervous.

It was a tall, thin man, dressed in the garments of the Spirit God Sect from the Realm of Dark Underworld. He had a set of deep and unfathomable eyes.

“Master Zhen...” The man said, staring down at Zhen Huilan, as if he was surprised that she was here.

“Yao Shou!” Zhen Huilan exclaimed with furrowed eyebrows.

The late Profound realm Yao Shou gave a wry smile and said, “I didn’t expect that I would see you here with these people from the Tool Sect.”

He was an elder of the Spirit God Sect, and the leader of their team into the newly-found dimension. He had actually come with the intention of taking the spatial rift from the Tool Sect disciples by force.

However, he had once asked Zhen Huilan to forge spiritual tools for his children before. She had done it as a favor for him.

Hence, the presence of Zhen Huilan made him hesitant, and put him at a loss as to what to do.

Meanwhile, he also didn’t know what he should do with Bai Yu, who was standing beside Zhen Huilan.

Her husband was Wu Langxie, who was an independent cultivator that possessed formidable battle prowess. It was public opinion that he had the potential to become the most powerful Qi warrior in the Domain of the Falling Stars some day.

Now that Zhao Shanling had returned, the Tool Sect was in a vulnerable place, so he wasn’t afraid of tearing his face with the Tool Sect. (idiom: tearing off the veneer of respect for someone)

However, even if the entire Tool Sect was wiped out, Wu Langxie would probably still be unscathed. Once he entered the late Soul realm, he would most likely become the worst foe anyone could imagine in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

If he cast aside his scruples and injured Bai Yu today, he would be planting future trouble for the Spirit God Sect and himself.

After a moment of silence, Yao Shou said, “How about this, Master Zhen: Let me and the other Spirit God Sect members enter that mysterious dimension through this spatial rift. In return, my people and I will help you guard this spatial rift against anyone or any sect that wants to take it from you. What do you say?”

“You said your people. Who do you mean?” Zhen Huilan asked.

“I came with two fellow disciples who are also at the late Profound realm.” Yao Shou was surprisingly honest. “If not for you and Elder Bai, we would have taken this spatial rift by force already.”

As an elder of the Tool Sect, Zhu Lian let out a cold harrumph and exclaimed, “Yao Shou! You don’t think I’m worth mentioning, do you?!”

Yao Shou gave a dry laugh and said bluntly, “Sorry, Brother Zhu. I’m just speaking the truth. If Zhao Shanling hadn’t returned and safely left the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, our sect wouldn’t have dared to do anything to jeopardize our relationship with your sect. After all, we might still need to ask your sect to help us forge spiritual tools.

“But now is a different time. The whole Tool Sect might fall into another’s hands in the near future.

“Under such circumstances, we don’t really care about our relationship with your sect anymore. If Master Zhen and Elder Bai weren’t here, I would have told you to leave now, instead of proposing to share this spatial rift.”

Zhu Lian fumed with anger after hearing these words.

The Tool Sect juniors beside Nie Tian also glared at Yao Shou, indignation filling their eyes.

Looking rather calm, Zhen Huilan asked, “Isn’t there a spatial rift that hasn’t been claimed yet? Why have you set your mind on our spatial rift when you can take that unclaimed one?”

Yao Shou sighed briefly and said, “The Thunder Mountain Sect and Heaven Expanse Sect from the Realm of Earth Sieve, and the Yin Sect and Yang Sect from the Realm of a Thousand Devastations are all fighting over that last unclaimed spatial rift. Compared to your spatial rift, it would be much riskier to fight for that one.”

“Instead of fighting that pack of wolves, we might as well...”

He smiled and didn't finish his sentence.

Even so, everyone knew what he meant. In his eyes, compared to fighting the Thunder Mountain Sect, Heaven Expanse Sect, Yin Sect, Yang Sect, and Flame God Sect at the same time, fighting the Tool Sect was much safer.

Zhu Lian and the all the other Worldly realm experts from the Tool Sect were all struggling to refrain from lashing out, though their eyes were filled with burning rage.

“What do you think, Junior Martial Sister Bai?” Zhen Huilan asked in a low voice.

After whispering something to Zhu Lian and telling him to hold his temper, Bai Yu turned to her and said, “Even though his words were harsh to the ear, at least he was honest about his intentions. The way I see it, even if it wasn't the Spirit God Sect that came after our spatial rift, other sects might. If it was the Flame God Sect, I doubt they would even want to talk.”

“That's very true, Elder Bai. I knew you were a reasonable person.” Yao Shou said with a flattering tone.

Zhen Huilan nodded and said to Yao Shou, “It's settled then. You may summon your people to this place now, and we shall guard and enter this spatial rift together.”

Yao Shou smiled. “Now that we're guarding this spatial rift together, I believe no one will dare to drool over it anymore.”

With these words, he sent messages to his subordinates.

Before long, more than ten Spirit God Sect Qi warriors flashed out of the dark, dense forest like a bunch of ghosts.

As soon as they did, Yao Shou went over and explained the situation to them.

The other two Profound realm Spirit God Sect experts didn't

seem content with his arrangement, which was their union with the Tool Sect. However, they eventually decided to give Yao Shou face and agreed to cooperate.

Watching those two Profound realm experts nod reluctantly, every Tool Sect member looked very displeased.

Chapter 486: Screams in the Night

The group of Qi warriors from the Spirit God Sect in the Realm of Dark Underworld found a suitable location in the dense forest and sat down.

Yao Shou was the only one who went to sit beside Zhen Huilan and the other powerful Tool Sect members, and chatted with her every now and then.

Nie Tian and the other Tool Sect juniors watched the Spirit God Sect Qi warriors from afar, not saying a word.

Even the most talkative one among them, Zhu Han, had become completely silent.

It was as if Yao Shou's attitude had already made him realize that the Tool Sect was no longer respected and revered by the other major powers.

If it weren't for Zhen Huilan's former association with Yao Shou, and if Bai Yu weren't here, those from the Spirit God Sect probably wouldn't have initiated a talk, but a bloody fight instead.

This night seemed especially long.

Every now and then, Nie Tian would be awoken from his cultivation by bloodcurdling screams in the distance. Since he didn't dare to unleash his Heaven Eyes, he wasn't sure what was happening.

However, he was certain that people were being killed.

"The other sects are clearing the mountain range," Huang Yuan said in a low voice.

Zhu Han kept silent, his face grim.

Wu Ling nodded and said, "Yeah, those sects don't want any local Qi warrior organizations to be a part of this. So they issued an expelling order earlier, demanding all local Qi warriors leave the

mountain range as quickly as possible. Now, the deadline must have arrived. Once they discover any risk-takers that dared to linger in the region, they'll kill them on site."

A sense of chilliness rose in Nie Tian's heart.

As of this moment, he finally realized how overbearing powerful sects like the Spirit God Sect, Flame God Sect, and Poison Sect actually were.

The six spatial rifts had appeared in the Realm of Split Void, yet they came over and kicked the local Qi warriors out of the Void Illusion Mountain Range.

When they found local Qi warriors who failed to leave past the deadline they had given, they killed them on sight.

In their eyes, none of the local Qi warrior organizations, including the Blood Skull, deserved to enter that mysterious dimension with them.

Deep in the night...

A Qi warrior who had lost his left arm suddenly jumped out of the dense forest, crying as he shot towards the spatial rift.

SHEW!

A Qi warrior dressed in Ice Pavilion sect garments shot out of the forest after the man. However, as soon as he looked down and saw people from both the Spirit God Sect and the Tool Sect, he went blank briefly.

"Shi Hui!" Pei Qiqi exclaimed.

Nie Tian looked up, and realized that the Qi warrior who had lost his left arm was none other than the Blood Skull's former guest elder, Shi Hui.

After breaking away from the Blood Skull, Shi Hui had joined the Wild Fire, and threatened to kill him to avenge Shi Nan.

He hadn't expected that Shi Hui would end up in such sore

straits.

Shi Hui's entire left side was now covered in frost. He seemed to have great difficulty moving that side.

Even so, his eyes were locked onto the spatial rift, which had still yet to stabilize. Apparently, he wanted to enter it with all of his heart.

Fierce sword intent suddenly burst forth from within him as he shot towards the spatial rift like a flying sword.

His eyes were filled with obsession. Yao Shou, who was sitting under the spatial rift, sighed, shaking his head. "Another foolish gambler."

Then, he reached out his hand and made a grabbing motion in the air towards Shi Hui.

In the next moment, a dark, mysterious vortex came to form in Yao Shou's palm.

The vortex thrummed with wave after wave of suffocating soul fluctuations as it shot up into the air and enveloped Shi Hui, who was only one step away from the spatial rift.

Shi Hui held his head with his one good hand and let out miserable wails, while blood spilled from his increasingly bulging eyes.

His dashing momentum was instantly stopped, and then his saggy body fell to the ground.

A hundred meters away, Nie Tian watched Shi Hui's body crash to the ground, and could feel that his soul had shattered and dissipated, as if it had been erased by the dark vortex unleashed by Yao Shou.

Seeing that Yao Shou had killed Shi Hui, the Ice Pavilion sect pursuer bowed towards him and said respectfully, "Thank you. As you were."

With these words, he left with a puzzled heart.

He seemed to wonder why people from the Spirit God Sect were with people from the Tool Sect.

Yao Shou didn't spare Shi Hui's corpse another glance. His eyes once again narrowed, as he seemed to have absolutely no interest in pillaging it. Perhaps in his eyes, the late Greater Heaven stage Shi Hui wouldn't possibly possess any valuable spiritual materials that he would set his eyes on.

Zhen Huilan, Bai Yu, and Zhu Lian didn't say anything either. They went right back to their quiet conversation, as if they didn't just witness Shi Hui's death.

Seeing their indifferent attitudes, Nie Tian took a deep breath to calm himself and resumed his cultivation.

After a while, a Profound realm expert dressed in Flame God Sect garments descended from the air like a burning meteor. He also noticed the uncommon scene as soon as he came to a stop.

"Yao Shou!" Face filled with surprise and confusion, he looked back and forth between Yao Shou and the people from the Tool Sect.

The expression of every Tool Sect member, including Zhen Huilan, grew grave the moment they saw that Flame God Sect expert.

Not long ago, the Flame God Sect had looted a copious amount of earthflame essence from the Realm of Unbounded Desolation while Zhao Shanling kept the Tool Sect busy. Those from the Tool Sect held deep grudges because of that.

Hence, it was only natural that they didn't have pleasant looks on their faces when they saw their enemy.

Yao Shou, who was also from the Realm of Dark Underworld, cleared his throat and said, "Gongsun Pu, we've already reached a mutual understanding with the Tool Sect. The Spirit God Sect and

the Tool Sect are guarding this spatial rift together.”

Gongsun Pu from the Flame God Sect had actually harbored the same intentions as Yao Shou had before.

He had also planned to snatch the spatial rift directly from the Tool Sect.

However, now that he saw Yao Shou here and learned that the Spirit God Sect had made a deal with the Tool Sect to guard this spatial rift together, he grew hesitant.

“Alright,” he said. “Since we’re both from the Realm of Dark Underworld, I’ll give you face and leave you alone.”

After a pause, he shot a glance at Zhu Lian and said, “It’s your lucky day today.”

With these words, he morphed into a streak of flames and disappeared into the distant sky.

The expressions of the Tool Sect members grew even grimmer than before as the atmosphere grew more and more stifling.

Everyone could see that if the Spirit God Sect weren’t here, Gongsun Pu from the Flame God Sect definitely would have started a fight to seize the spatial rift.

Yao Shou spread out his hands, smiling. “As you just saw, if we hadn’t joined hands, but instead you guys had guarded this spatial rift alone, other sects would have come and try to take it, even if I hadn’t.”

Awkward expressions appeared on Zhen Huilan and Bai Yu’s faces.

Even Zhu Lian didn’t seem as angry as before, as if he had finally found peace with the truth.

Over the following few days, Nie Tian often heard people fighting and screaming in the vicinity as everyone waited for the spatial rift to stabilize. Occasionally, some local Qi warriors would risk their

lives by attempting to enter the spatial rift. However, every one of them was annihilated by powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect effortlessly.

Nie Tian also noticed that a handful of Blood Skull members were killed by powerful experts from the Ice Pavilion sect and Thunder Mountain Sect before they got anywhere near the spatial rift.

That was when he realized what Shi Qing had meant previously by saying that the Void Illusion Mountain Range had turned into hell on earth.

From the look of it, the powerful sects from the other eight realms planned to killed every local Qi warrior that dared to remain in the mountain range before those spatial rifts fully stabilized.

Just like Pei Qiqi had said, people were dying every day, and the entire Realm of Split Void had fallen into chaos. He could only watch as things like this happened.

During this time, some of the other sects had also sent people here in attempts to take the spatial rift from the Tool Sect. However, they all started weighing their choices upon seeing the people from the Spirit God Sect, and eventually left.

Just like that, the Spirit God Sect and the Tool Sect managed to hold the spatial rift together.

One day, at midday.

Zhen Huilan, who was cultivating under the spatial rift, suddenly opened her eyes and said, "Alright, we can enter now."

Upon hearing these words, everyone who had been waiting for quite some time rose with force and spirit.

Yao Shou rose to his feet and said to Zhen Huilan, "You may go in first."

Zhen Huilan nodded, and after brief hesitation, she said, "You

actually don't have to arrange for people to stay here and guard the spatial rift. The spatial energy fluctuations within the six spatial rifts actually follow certain patterns. At this moment, this spatial rift is stable, and we'll be safe to enter it, but it'll become extremely turbulent and violent in an hour.

"If you fail to enter in an hour, you'll miss your chance.

"Even I can't predict when it will calm down and become stable again."

Looking grateful, Yao Shou said, "Thank you for telling me this, Master Zhen."

Zhen Huilan waved at Pei Qiqi and the other juniors, beckoning them to enter the spatial rift one after another. "Hurry up. Don't dawdle."

Without any delay, Nie Tian rose to his feet and followed the Tool Sect juniors into the spatial rift.

After everyone from the Tool Sect was in, Zhen Huilan turned to Yao Shou and said, "Watch the time."

Chapter 487: Bone Remains

Countless stars shone brightly in the sky.

A vast continent was floating above boundless grayish-brown clouds.

Nie Tian stood by the edge of the floating continent, where a slender spatial rift was hanging over everyone's head like a huge sword.

He gazed off into the distance and saw many more floating continents, some of which were even bigger than the one they were standing on.

However, most of them were small ones that were only several square kilometers wide. They seemed to be channeled by some sort of force as they floated slowly and disorderly.

There wasn't a sun or moon, just stars. The spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth didn't exist in the air, nor did any energy that other outsider races could use as a power source.

SHEW!

Zhen Huilan was the last one to fly out of the slender spatial rift and land in the middle of everyone.

Eyes narrowed, she glanced around at this strange heaven and earth, and then said, "There is a small Space Spirit Jade mineral vein in the continent we are now standing on."

Pei Qiqi's eyes instantly lit up.

"Qiqi, go and see if you can gather those Space Spirit Jades," Zhen Huilan ordered.

Pei Qiqi nodded and sped off towards the center of the continent, her body thrumming with spatial energy ripples as she tried to detect the Space Spirit Jades.

All the others remained at the edge of the continent, glancing

around, hoping to gain a better understanding of this mysterious place.

Nie Tian was no exception.

Since Zhu Lian, Bai Yu, and the others were around, he didn't unleash his Heaven Eyes, but rather gazed around with his eyes.

He tried jumping, and instantly shot dozens of meters into the sky. Expression flickering, he exclaimed, "I can barely feel any gravity!"

Shocked, Wu Ling and the others tried jumping after him. Every one of them shot dozens of meters into the sky and landed steadily.

Standing by the edge of the floating continent, Nie Tian gazed down, and discovered that the boundless grayish-brown clouds were like a sea of clouds, preventing him from seeing what was underneath them.

He gazed ahead, and saw that numerous huge boulders were floating about slowly.

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! WHOOSH!

Yao Shou and other Spirit God Sect members flew through the spatial rift and landed among the Tool Sect members one after another. Afterwards, they regathered into a group.

Yao Shou and the other two Profound realm experts from the Spirit God Sect didn't speak immediately after assuming a firm foothold, but rather glanced around curiously.

They also noticed the large number of continents floating in the distance, and the even larger number of floating boulders around them.

"Master Zhen, this is..." Yao Shou said, frowning. As seasoned and knowledgeable as he was, he didn't know what he was looking at.

Zhen Huilan pondered as she said. "This vast dimension

somehow exploded, forming many floating continents and broken boulders. The explosion destroyed the gravitational field, and the special energy of heaven and earth that originally enveloped the whole continent changed and became the grayish-brown cloud sea underneath us.”

Instantly enlightened, Yao Shou pondered for a while in silence, then said, “I’ll go and take a look around.”

With these words, he circulated his spiritual power and flew away from the floating continent that everyone else was standing on, towards a huge boulder that was floating nearby.

Like a feather, he soon landed on the huge boulder. After a brief scan, he didn’t find anything noteworthy, and thus flew towards another boulder that was floating in a farther location.

Seeing that he had headed out, Bai Yu said, “Let’s take a look in the vicinity as well.”

The ring of holding on her finger flickered, and immediately afterwards, a Rainbow Lightning appeared before her.

After jumping onto it, she stood at the prow, where she unleashed a layer of crimson spiritual light that enveloped the Rainbow Lightning and her petite physique.

In this strange dimension where the gravitational field had been destroyed, the Rainbow Lightning sped off like a bolt of lightning in the opposite direction that Yao Shou had gone in.

Afterwards, the other two Profound realm experts from the Spirit God Sect, Zhen Huilan, and Zhu Lian also left this floating continent and went searching in nearby areas.

Meanwhile, the Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage Qi warriors from the Spirit God Sect spread out and started examining the continent with their psychic awareness.

The Tool Sect juniors were the only ones who stayed in place and continued to glance around with their curious gazes.

A hour passed...

One after another, people gradually returned to the place where they had first landed. They all shook their heads and said they hadn't found anything noteworthy on the continents and boulders they had gone to.

Bai Yu was the only one who didn't come back empty-handed.

She returned with a floating mountain of grayish-brown bones that was nearly a thousand meters high. She dragged it back effortlessly with numerous red ribbons.

The mountain of bones stopped and floated by the edge of the continent.

Nie Tian inwardly marveled as he stared at it. He noticed that the magnificent mountain of grayish-brown bones was filled with holes that were the size of fists, making it look like a colossal beehive.

Furthermore, the mountain of bones seemed to be empty inside.

"This is...." Staring at the thousand-meter-high mountain of bones, Yao Shou, who had returned earlier, couldn't help but approach and reach out to touch it.

The moment his hand made contact with one of the grayish-brown bones, it became flying scraps that rapidly vanished completely.

Zhen Huilan's eyes lit up as she shot a beam of light out of her fingertip. As soon as it shot into the mountain of bones that was riddled with holes, countless bones were instantly reduced to flying dust.

"The power within these bones must have dissipated over however long they have existed," Zhen Huilan said, contemplating simultaneously. "If my speculations are correct, this mountain of bones is one of the Bonebrutes' ancient starships. The Bonebrutes' ancient starships were all forged with bones and in the shape of

pyramids.”

“One of the Bonebrutes’ ancient starships!?” Yao Shou exclaimed.

At that moment, Bai Yu, who had taken it back to their landing site, said, “I’ve done a thorough examination. There aren’t any Bonebrute remains inside this hollow mountain of bones. It seems to have been penetrated by countless sharp blades at the same time, and lost the ability to travel through the void, so it was eventually abandoned.

“After all these years, the bones seem to have lost all of their power. That explains why they turn into flying dust upon contact.”

Astonished, Zhu Lian asked, “Why would an ancient starship of the Bonebrutes’ appear here? And who riddled it with holes?”

Everyone else was thinking the same questions.

“Senior Yao!” At that moment, the voice of a Spirit God Sect Qi warrior echoed out from a distant location on the floating continent they were standing on.

Yao Shou instantly flew towards the source of the voice.

Even though the Tool Sect members were curious about what it was about, they remained where they were.

It wasn’t long before Yao Shou returned with three human corpses.

He casually threw the corpses before the crowd and said, “My men found them. From the way they are dressed, they weren’t with any of the powers that have come from the eight realms.”

Nie Tian jumped in and blurted. “They are members of the Dark Moon.”

Ma Jiu, who he had dealt with before, was among the dead Yao Shou threw to the ground.

A few years ago, Ma Jiu had ambushed Pei Qiqi in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. After that, Nie Tian had rescued her from him and his men.

Yao Shou took a glance at Nie Tian and said, “That means they are local Qi warriors then. They must have come in here before us, and for some reason, died here.”

Bai Yu and Zhen Huilan walked over to the three corpses and squatted down to examine them.

After a thorough examination, they both shook their heads, failing to identify the cause of their deaths.

“Their rings of holding are still here,” Yao Shou, who had already examined the corpses, said with a furrowed brow. “And there aren’t any fatal wounds on them. I can’t find the cause of their deaths.”

At that moment, Pei Qiqi returned quietly and whispered to her master, “There were only a small amount of Space Spirit Jades in that buried Space Spirit Jade mineral vein. I’ve mined them all.”

Yao Shou and the other powerful experts from the Spirit God Sect seemed surprised as they overheard Pei Qiqi’s words.

Space Spirit Jades were very precious spiritual materials for Qi warriors who practiced spatial power. However, since none of the Spirit God Sect experts practiced spatial power, they didn’t show any intention of asking for a share of them.

A quarter hour later...

The Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage Spirit God Sect members returned from different directions on the floating continents. Under Yao Shou’s inquiring gaze, they all shook their heads, and said that they hadn’t found anything worth noting.

As a matter of fact, Yao Shou and the other powerful experts had already scanned this floating continent with their strong soul awareness when they had first landed on it, and none of them had

detected any signs of life or soul fluctuations.

Everyone's search results confirmed their speculations.

"What's your plan, Master Zhen?" Yao Shou asked.

"I'm not sure yet," Zhen Huilan said with a serious expression. "Considering that local Qi warriors have already come and searched this continent, I suppose we probably won't find anything here. I think I'll go to search in further areas with other Tool Sect members. What's your plan?"

Yao Shou looked up into the air and asked, "Master Zhen, when do you think this spatial rift will become stable again?"

"From the look of it, it won't fully stabilize within a short time," Zhen Huilan answered. "This spatial rift that leads to the Void Illusion Mountain Range is constantly changing. Every time it stabilizes, it will become even more turbulent and violent afterwards. So I can't tell for sure when it will become safe to pass again."

Yao Shou nodded and said, "I see. Okay, let's leave a mark here, and start our separate searches."

"Sure." Zhen Huilan agreed.

Chapter 488: Discoveries

After leaving a special mark on the floating continent where the spatial rift was, the Spirit God Sect and the Tool Sect split up.

Bai Yu waved and beckoned Wu Ling, Huang Yuan, and a few other Tool Sect juniors to board her Rainbow Lightning. Meanwhile, Zhu Lian summoned another Rainbow Lightning and told the other Tool Sect members to get on board.

Zhen Huilan summoned her Lightning Shuttle from within her ring of holding and beckoned Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi to jump in.

Afterwards, the Rainbow Lightnings and Lightning Shuttle flew away from the floating continent.

Since the gravitational field was very weak, the speed at which the Lightning Shuttle and Rainbow Lightnings traveled was very fast, and it didn't require as much spiritual power to propel them.

Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi stood in the Lightning Shuttle and glanced around curiously.

From time to time, the Lightning Shuttle would pass floating boulders, which were moving in some unknown pattern. It was just they were moving at a far lower speed than the Lightning Shuttle.

Zhen Huilan's eyes narrowed as waves of extremely intense soul fluctuations spread out from her.

Standing beside her, Nie Tian could tell with great clarity that the soul fluctuations she was unleashing contained unfathomable truths of spatial energy. As they rippled out into the distance, they seemed to cause space to flicker slightly.

At that moment, Bai Yu, who was steering the Rainbow Lightning in the front, suddenly turned around and said with a smile, "Senior martial sister, I actually found something other than that mountain of bones. Come with me."

Zhen Huilan's eyes lit up.

The mountain of bones Bai Yu had brought back to them earlier had lost its value due to long-term erosion. The energy within those bones was completely gone.

If the mountain of bones hadn't been riddled with holes, perhaps she wouldn't have brought it back and showed it to the people from the Spirit God Sect.

After hearing her words, everyone looked spirited and expectant.

The Rainbow Lightnings and Lightning Shuttle rapidly flew past numerous floating boulders. An hour later, a volcano that had a penetrating hole in the middle entered everyone's view.

Even though they were still thousands of meters away, Nie Tian could see crimson flames flickering within the enormous hole that went through the volcano.

The volcano was about three thousand meters high and roughly in the shape of a pagoda. It was unknown how long it had been there.

The silent volcano was surrounded by layers of very turbulent and unstable spatial energy.

It was because of that layer of spatial energy that Bai Yu hadn't stayed to examine it earlier.

She was an expert of fire-attributed incantations and an equipment forger. However, she didn't practice spatial power.

Without a deep understanding of spatial power, she hadn't dared to handle the layer of spatial energy lightly.

Therefore, she had waited for them to part ways with the people from the Spirit God Sect to take Zhen Huilan to it.

Soon, the Rainbow Lightnings and Lightning Shuttle came to a stop before the floating volcano. Bai Yu didn't say anything, but rather looked towards Zhen Huilan.

Eyes narrowed, Zhen Huilan took out her folding fan from within her ring of holding.

As she waved the fan, spatial energy fluctuations spread out towards the floating volcano like ripples on water.

Nie Tian looked at them with rapt attention.

It was unknown what kind of powerful weapon could have created such a huge, penetrating hole through the volcano. Through the fire-flickering mouth of the hole, Nie Tian could vaguely see lava bubbling within the heart of the volcano.

Instead of forming Heaven Eyes, he unleashed his psychic awareness in an attempt to examine that layer of mysterious energy.

However, as soon as the wisp of his psychic awareness flew close to it, he experienced an excruciating pain in his head.

Thus, he had to withdraw his psychic awareness.

Meanwhile, a strange look appeared in Zhen Huilan's eyes. Countless fine strands of spatial energy rapidly formed and dissipated in the depths of her pupils.

Standing next to her, Nie Tian was flabbergasted as he looked into her eyes.

Then, he noticed that the image of the floating volcano had mysteriously appeared on the empty folding fan she was waving.

On the fan, the miniature of the floating volcano was bound down by numerous bright strings of spatial power, many of which even went through the volcano.

Astonished by the scene, Nie Tian couldn't help but inwardly marvel at the profundity of spatial magics and those who practiced spatial power.

"That paper fan in my master's hand is a spatial spiritual tool named the Illusion Realm," Pei Qiqi explained to Nie Tian in a low

voice. “However, it doesn’t have its own soul yet, and it can’t actually create an independent realm. It’s extremely hard to find and refine souls for spatial spiritual tools. My master has looked for years, but still can’t find a suitable soul for it.

“If she can find a suitable dimension and seal it within the Illusion Realm, and meanwhile find and refine a fitting soul into it, and have it rule over that dimension, the Illusion Realm will transcend into a Spirit Channeling grade treasure.”

A shocked expression appeared on Nie Tian’s face.

Zhen Huilan’s lips pursed into a smile as she said, “Kiddo, I don’t think I’ll be able to find a suitable dimension and a soul for the Illusion Realm and turn it into a Spirit Channeling grade treasure in my lifetime.

“But I hope that you’ll fulfill this long-cherished wish for me some day.”

After she uttered these words, the Illusion Realm suddenly shot out of her hand and flew towards the volcano before them.

The mysterious spatial fluctuations wreathing the volcano seemed to instantly stabilize and became harmless as the Illusion Realm approached.

Zhu Lian and Bai Yu both looked deeply at her, their eyes filled with astonishment.

“This volcano must have been a part of that vast dimension before the explosion happened,” Zhen Huilan explained to everyone. “It appears that an expert of spatial power, who I don’t think was a human, penetrated it with some sort of profound spatial magic. The spatial power he or she used to bombard this volcano contained faint bloodline power.

“If my speculations are correct, that expert most likely carried a bloodline that naturally vested him or her with spatial power.

“The spatial power within the strike that expert penetrated this

volcano with still exists after what could be tens of thousands of years. It's just that it now exists in the form of a layer of spatial fluctuations around the volcano."

Nie Tian, who was standing next to Pei Qiqi, sensed with great clarity that Pei Qiqi shuddered upon hearing these words.

Zhu Lian gasped with astonishment and exclaimed, "An outsider whose bloodline contains spatial power?! As far as I know, none of the Demons, Fiends, Phantasms, or Bonebrutes carry bloodlines that contain spatial power, right?"

Bai Yu was also deeply surprised. "What outsider race carries bloodlines that allow them to awaken bloodline talents regarding spatial power?"

Zhen Huilan gave a bitter smile and said, "Our understanding of outsider races is very limited. We only know about the Demons, Fiends, Phantasms, and Bonebrutes because they used to live in the Domain of the Falling Stars, and these realms were their paradise before human Qi warriors from the Ancient Fragmentary Star Palace came along.

"However, it's very possible that other mysterious outsider races live in places in this boundless universe that we've never been to.

"We don't know about them because they've never come to the Domain of the Falling Stars and left any traces."

Zhu Lian nodded slightly and said, "Yeah, that's possible."

"Alright, let's go take a look at that volcano," Zhen Huilan said with a plain tone. "I only managed to break the layer of spatial energy left there by that outsider expert with my Illusion Realm because it has been dissipating over a very long time. I can't imagine how powerful that outsider expert was back in the day, and if the expert is still alive..."

Everyone's expression flickered before she even finished her sentence, not daring to think about the outsider's devastating

strength.

With great caution, they steered the Rainbow Lightnings and Lightning Shuttle towards the enormous hole in the volcano.

Only after they reached the mouth of the hole without feeling any abnormal spatial fluctuations did Bai Yu finally let out a sigh of relief. She wreathed her petite physique with crimson spiritual light, and flew into the volcano through the hole, which was still filled with flickering flames.

Aside from spatial power, Zhen Huilan was also well-versed in the practice of flame power. However, seeing that Bai Yu had moved out, she remained where she was, and the Lightning Shuttle stopped by the mouth of the huge hole.

WHOOSH!

She made a grabbing motion in the air, and the Illusion Realm flew into her palm. She handed it to Pei Qiqi and said expressionlessly, "See if you can derive some enlightenment from it."

Pei Qiqi's slender, jade-like hand trembled slightly as she received the folding fan.

Her eyes flickered with the light of excitement, as if she were struggling to suppress her thrilled heart.

Nie Tian's keen perception allowed him to notice something strange. The moment Pei Qiqi touched the paper fan, a spatial ward that was invisible to the naked eye instantly wreathed her.

At the same time, the spatial energy wreathing the floating volcano gradually vanished.

Instead, ripples of spatial power started to spread out from inside Pei Qiqi, and fine strands of spatial power appeared in the depths of her pupils.

Meanwhile, very subtle flesh power fluctuations rose from

within her.

The flesh power within her seemed to be isolated from the outside world by numerous spatial wards, making it very hard to detect.

However, Nie Tian, who was standing right next to her, and carried a bloodline that contained the profound truths of life, managed to sense it.

Nie Tian was momentarily bewildered.

In the blink of an eye, the residual spatial energy surrounding the floating volcano completely vanished.

After handing the fan back to her master, Pei Qiqi gently closed her eyes as she leaned against the inside of the Lightning Shuttle and pondered in silence.

“There are quite a few fire-attributed crystals within the heart of the volcano, along with a small amount of earthflame essence!” Bai Yu’s overjoyed exclamation echoed out from the within the enormous hole. “Not just that, I’ve also found a dead Earth Flame Beast!”

Chapter 489: Betrayal

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

As Bai Yu's voice echoed out, the enormous hole seemed as if it were being further ripped apart by a mysterious force.

Bai Yu's petite figure appeared at the mouth of the hole, dragging a large Earth Flame Beast behind her with a number of colorful ribbons.

That Earth Flame Beast was almost twice as large as the one Nie Tian had seen in the Scarlet Flame Mountain Range.

There was an obvious puncture wound on the Earth Flame Beast's forehead. Apparently, something had gone through its head and killed it.

Bai Yu dragged the Earth Flame Beast towards the others. Pointing at it, she said with great excitement, "This Earth Flame Beast was probably the true target of whoever created that enormous hole in the volcano!"

"Look! This Earth Flame Beast has four long blazing tails! This is a seventh grade Earth Flame Beast!"

"A seventh grade Earth Flame Beast!" Zhu Lian's eyes grew wide as he instantly flew to the Earth Flame Beast's side. Numerous tiny lightning bolts rose from his fingertips and flew into the Earth Flame Beast's gigantic body, where they examined it carefully.

In the next moment, his eyes lit up as he exclaimed, "There's still copious amount of flame power within this dead Earth Flame Beast! Its bones are still imprinted with the profound truths of flame power! The battle prowess of this seventh grade Earth Flame Beast was equal to that of a Soul realm human expert! If we carve its body up, we can harvest the core materials to forge a fire-attributed Spirit Channeling grade treasure!"

Zhen Huilan was also inwardly shocked, and said, "If this Earth

Flame Beast's soul hasn't completely dissipated into heaven and earth, I have complete and utter confidence that I'll be able to forge a fire-attributed Spirit Channeling grade treasure with its soul and body parts!"

The other Tool Sect Qi warriors were also overjoyed as they gazed at the gigantic Earth Flame Beast with wide eyes.

They had never expected that they would gain the corpse of a seventh grade Earth Flame Beast so soon after entering this mysterious dimension.

Even if its soul had completely dissipated, many of its parts were still very precious treasures.

Its bones, skin, teeth, and eyes could all be used to forge spiritual tools.

For those who practiced fire incantations, the profound truths of flame power branded in its bones were rare treasures they could try to derive enlightenment from.

Standing off to the side, Nie Tian sensed the yearning of the Flame Dragon Armor as the Earth Flame Beast was dragged towards them.

It seemed as if the Flame Dragon Armor, which had been absorbing earthflame essence from within that large crystal, had just found a better target, and thus was eager to charge out of his ring of holding into the dead Earth Flame Beast and devour all of its residual flame power.

Therefore, Nie Tian had to spare some of his attention to hold the restless Flame Dragon Armor down, stopping it from unveiling his true identity.

As hard as she tried, Bai Yu failed to mask her excitement and joy. "There is still earthflame essence in the heart of the volcano. I left a storage tool there. It won't take very long to gather all of the earthflame essence that remains."

With a broad smile, she looked at Zhu Lian and Zhen Huilan and said, “We’ll split the earthflame essence three ways after it finishes collecting. I don’t plan to carve up this Earth Flame Beast for now. I think I’ll take its intact corpse back to the Tool Sect.”

Then, she turned to look Zhen Huilan in the eye and said, “Perhaps we might be able to forge a spiritual tool out of its intact body. Don’t worry, senior martial sister. I’m only able to get it out of the volcano because you’ve stabilized the spatial fluctuations for us. You’ll get your fair share after this Earth Flame Beast is evaluated.”

With a faint smile, Zhen Huilan said, “Sure, I know I can trust you for that.”

Everyone was full of smiles as they looked the seventh grade Earth Flame Beast up and down, feeling that they had made the wisest decision of their lives by fighting to gain control of one spatial rift and entering it despite the risks.

“There are also some fire-attributed materials in the heart of the volcano,” Bai Yu said. “I’ll gather them and sort them through after my storage tool finishes gathering the earthflame essence.”

Both Zhu Lian and Zhen Huilan nodded briefly.

WHOOSH!

While they were in the middle of discussing how they would divide their loot, a ring of holding suddenly flew over from the distance.

In the blink of an eye, it arrived in front of the Earth Flame Beast’s gigantic body, where it turned into a gray vortex and created a violent suction force.

Channeled by the strong force, the large, mountain-like Earth Flame Beast started floating towards the gray vortex.

The expressions of Zhu Lian and the other powerful experts flickered drastically as they instantly blossomed with dazzling

spiritual power, and reached out their hands in an attempt to destroy the ring of holding that had appeared out of nowhere.

An intense sense of danger instantly caused Nie Tian's hair to stand on end. He subconsciously pulled Pei Qiqi's arm as he circulated his spiritual power.

Eyes still closed, Pei Qiqi seemed to be completely unaware of what was happening in the real world. Her eyes snapped open as soon as Nie Tian pulled her arm.

With bewildered eyes, she asked, "What's wrong?"

"Who's there?!" Zhu Lian thundered. One after another, numerous cyan thunderballs with a metallic luster shot out of his leveled sleeve, each of which looked like a fruit ripe with thunder power.

In the next moment, rolls of thunder filled the air, as if heaven and earth were wreathed with lightning power.

Zhen Huilan also took out her Illusion Realm and gazed up into the air with a vigilant expression, as if she were facing formidable foes.

A vague figure quietly appeared over the ring of holding.

Shocked and confused, Zhen Huilan exclaimed, "Cheng Qian?! What are you doing here?!"

Nie Tian immediately looked up and realized that the person who had just seized the seventh grade Earth Flame Beast's corpse with his ring of holding was Cheng Qian, one of the late Profound realm experts from the Spirit God Sect.

They had split up when they had left the floating continent where they had first landed. Right now, they should be searching in completely separate areas. It wasn't likely that they had encountered each other again by accident.

However, not only had he suddenly appeared here, but he had

even attempted to seize the Earth Flame Beast's corpse as soon as he did.

WHOOSH!

Another person flashed into appearance from behind a floating boulder.

With a glance at the man, Zhu Lian's face gradually fell as he exclaimed, "Lu Jianfan! What the hell are the two of you doing?! We had an agreement that we'd split up and leave each other alone after entering this dimension! We found this Earth Flame Beast. You did nothing to contribute. Don't tell me that now you want to take a share of it?!"

Zhen Huilan also burst into a fuming rage. "I can't believe you actually followed us here behind Yao Shou's back!"

WHOOSH!

As they spoke, the seventh grade Earth Flame Beast was sucked into Cheng Qian's ring of holding.

Cheng Qian's expression was the same as ever. With a scary smile, he ran his gaze over the crowd and said slowly, "Who said we're doing this behind his back?"

Lu Jianfan's face split into a sinister grin as he said, "We knew you must have found something. That's why we secretly followed you here. If we sell this seventh grade Earth Flame Beast to the Flame God Sect, Xia Yi will surely throw his weight in to pay for it!"

"We found that Earth Flame Beast!" Bai Yu exclaimed.

Lu Jianfan shook his head as he let out a sigh and said, "It seems that you still don't understand the situation. Big Brother Yao, I think it's necessary that you explain it to them."

Zhen Huilan was flabbergasted. "Yao Shou is here too?!"

Upon hearing that Yao Shou had also taken part in the betrayal,

Bai Yu' and Zhu Lian's faces grew increasingly grave.

As expected, following Lu Jianfan's words, another person slowly flew out from behind another floating boulder.

The disciples of the Spirit God Sect practiced a special incantation, most of which was related to souls and soul power.

For that reason, disciples of the Spirit God Sect were all skilled at hiding the aura of their souls.

Since Yao Shou, Cheng Qian, and Lu Jianfan were all late Profound realm experts from the Spirit God Sect, even Zhen Huilan had failed to discover that they had masked their soul aura and stealthily followed them to this location.

"What do you want, Yao Shou?" Zhen Huilan asked coldly.

Nie Tian followed her gaze and also looked at Yao Shou.

Unlike before, Yao Shou's expression was now cold and gruesome. From the look of it, he wasn't going to talk pleasantly this time. Eyes filled with killing intent, he said in a low voice, "Master Zhen, we reached a mutual understanding with the Flame God Sect long before we came over to your spatial rift. Also, after all of you went through that spatial rift, powerful experts from the Flame God Sect came upon receiving my message and entered this dimension right before the one hour time limit you told me about.

"I'm sorry that I tricked you.

"But neither us nor the Flame God Sect have someone as skilled at using spatial power as you. We needed you to tell us about the spatial rift, including how long it would stay stable."

Furious, Zhen Huilan thundered, "You used me!?"

Yao Shou let out a soft sigh and said, "The Tool Sect is destined to fall into another's hands. Plus, the way I see it, I don't think we count as friends. We needed you to explain the things we didn't know about that spatial rift. Oh right, one last thing, I was worried

that word would spread if we killed you in the Void Illusion Mountain Range. I didn't want that psycho Wu Langxie to know that his wife and son had died at our hands and seek revenge.

“Now that we're here, we don't need to worry about that anymore.

“As powerful as Wu Langxie is, he can't possibly learn that it's us that killed his wife and son in this unknown, remote dimension.”

Upon hearing these words, the expression of every Tool Sect member flickered drastically.

They finally realized that what the Spirit God Sect really wanted wasn't just that Earth Flame Beast, but the deaths of all the Tool Sect members!

Chapter 490: Grand Soul Grinder

Everyone's blood ran cold as they listened Yao Shou bring out every detail of his scheme.

By the time he was finished, the Tool Sect members finally realized that they weren't just planning to seize the Earth Flame Beast's corpse, but they were planning to finish off every Tool Sect member here.

Face grim, Nie Tian secretly circulated his spiritual power as he exchanged a glance with Pei Qiqi.

Zhen Huilan's eyes were filled with burning rage as she said, "Yao Shou! Are you really so confident that you'll be able to take us?"

Bai Yu and Zhu Lian, who had already summoned their spiritual tools, were now whispering something to Wu Ling and the others, their eyes fixed on the formidable foes before them.

A whisper that was as soft as a mosquito's voice rang out in Nie Tian's and Pei Qiqi's ears as Zhen Huilan berated Yao Shou furiously. "When the moment comes, you two take the Lightning Shuttle and leave. I'll go find you after losing these people from the Spirit God Sect." The whisper came from Zhen Huilan, who was still speaking.

"Master Zhen, do you doubt that the three of us combined will overpower you?" Yao Shou said coldly. Not a shred of a smile could be seen on Yao Shou's face anymore, and the killing intent in his eyes grew increasingly fierce. "With all due respect, both you and Elder Bai Yu have been focusing on equipment forging, so your battle prowess has suffered, not to mention that Elder Bai Yu is only at the middle Profound realm."

A frosty light flashed across Zhen Huilan's furious eyes. "Do you imagine that you'll be able to kill us without paying a price? Even

if we going down, we'll take you with us!"

Nie Tian was inwardly suspicious.

Even though Yao Shou, Cheng Qian, and Lu Jianfan were all late Profound realm experts, it wasn't very likely that they could kill Zhen Huilan, Zhu Lian, and Bai Yu without paying a huge price.

From the look of it, those from the Spirit God Sect didn't intend to let any Tool Sect member walk out of here alive, but didn't they worry that they'd suffer great casualties as well?

"As I just told you, while we followed you to this place, people from the Flame God Sect also went through your spatial rift and entered this dimension," Yao Shou said with a cold face. "It won't be long before the Flame God Sect experts get to this place. We just need to stall you and wait for Gongsun Pu and the others from the Flame God Sect to arrive. Now, do you still think you have a chance of escaping from us?"

At that moment, Zhen Huilan's low whisper once again rang out by Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi's ears. "Go! Now!"

Simultaneously, she launched attacks.

The paper fan named Illusion Realm instantly flew into the huge hole in the floating volcano.

In the next moment, loud rumbles echoed out from the heart of the volcano, while fine beams of bright spatial energy rose from its massive form.

At the same time, the volcano rammed towards Yao Shou with a crashing momentum.

Raging lava spilled from the huge hole in the volcano, forming numerous chains of flames, which flew towards Yao Shou in an attempt to entangle him.

Streams of fire swam in the depths of Ba Yu's pupils as she formed exquisite hand seals to provide Zhen Huilan with

assistance.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

A gigantic, fiery crystal floated out of the hole in the volcano.

The crystal was the storage tool Bai Yu had previously used to gather earthflame essence. At this moment, wisps of earthflame essence could be seen swimming inside of it.

As Bai Yu cast another spell, wisps of earthflame essence suddenly shot out of the fiery crystal and morphed into numerous sparkling and crystal-clear strings.

At first glance, the chains looked very much like the crystal-like chains within the green aura which resided in Nie Tian's heart.

Like spiritual snakes, the fiery strings shot towards Yao Shou, making crackling sounds as they did.

With a pitiful expression, Yao Shou sighed and said, "It's such a waste that you used those precious earthflame crystalstrings as one-time attacking weapons."

"Fan out and run!!" With an explosive roar, Zhu Lian shot out numerous cyan thunderballs from his cuff, each of which seemed to be formed with pure thunder power.

The moment he did, heaven-shaking, earth-shattering rolls of thunder filled the air.

Sky-filling thunderballs rapidly aligned in midair, forming a tight and formidable formation.

As soon as the formation came to form, the vast area above everyone's head instantly turned into a zone of terror, where it rained long and thick lightning bolts, and raging thunder power filled the heavens.

SHEW! SHEW!

Wu Ling, Huang Yuan, Zhu Han, and the other Tool Sect Qi warriors, who were at the Worldly realm and Greater Heaven

stage, jumped onto two Rainbow Lightnings and sped off in opposite directions.

Lightning flashed and thunder rolled. Numerous huge lightning bolts that resembled Lightning Dragons seemed to be clearing the way for the juniors.

WHOOSH!

Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi jumped onto the Lightning Shuttle, which instantly sped off into the distance under Pei Qiqi's control.

Countless lightning bolts fell from the heavens behind and on either side of the Lightning Shuttle. However, not a single bolt of lightning struck down in front of the Lightning Shuttle, in the direction where it was heading.

Nie Tian instantly realized that Zhu Lian's thunder formation was also protecting their Lightning Shuttle.

To his surprise, neither Yao Shou, Liu Jianfan, nor Cheng Qian seemed very concerned with the escape of the Rainbow Lightnings and their Lightning Shuttle.

None of them even attempted to stop them from leaving.

"Watch out!" Zhen Huilan's voice once again rang out in Nie Tian's and Pei Qiqi's ears. "Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage members of the Spirit God Sect must be waiting for you on the perimeter. Yao Shou must have arranged for them to keep a sizable distance from them so that they wouldn't be exposed. So they must be waiting in the vicinity.

"Your opponents will be those Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage members of the Spirit God Sect, and perhaps even members of the Flame God Sect who might arrive at any moment."

"Take care of yourself, master!" Pei Qiqi whispered back.

She stood unwavering at the prow of the Lightning Shuttle, and steered it meticulously with her psychic awareness.

After she uttered those words, Nie Tian could sense that there wasn't a shred of distracting thought in her mind anymore, and escape was all she had on her mind.

Nie Tian nodded at her back.

He couldn't help but admire her calmness in such a crucial moment.

Knowing that her master was deep under siege, she was still able to stay rational and follow her master's orders so that she didn't become her master's burden.

Nie Tian thought if it were Wu Ji who was trapped by enemies, instead of Zhen Huilan, he probably wouldn't have behaved so rationally and decisively.

As the Lightning Shuttle traveled through the air at lightning speed, Nie Tian repeatedly turned his head back to look at the heaven and earth filled with lightning bolts and thunder rolls.

He noticed that, due to Zhen Huilan's channeling, the volcano seemed to have rammed into Yao Shou, giving rise to loud rumbles.

At that moment, a bleak aura that made his soul tremble suddenly spread out from the battlefield behind him. Nie Tian let out a muffled groan as his expression flickered.

Three misty, gray vortexes flew out of the lightning-wreathed area. They spun rapidly and unleashed terrifyingly strong soul power.

The three gray vortexes were like three large grinders that could grind the souls of all living creatures into shreds. Even though there was a significant distance between him and the vortexes, Nie Tian felt a splitting pain in his head, as if his soul sea were going to collapse.

"It's the Spirit God Sect's secret soul magic: Grand Soul Grinder." Pei Qiqi's tone was ice-cold. "Those soul grinders are actually

aimed at my master, Bai Yu, and Zhu Lian. We're just being slightly affected."

With these words, multiple spatial energy wards spread out from within her, immunizing her from any influence.

Experiencing a splitting pain in his head, Nie Tian couldn't help but howl. Just as he was about to fall unconscious, the nine fragmentary stars in his soul started to shine with blinding light.

As soon as they started to shine, a calming aura fell on Nie Tian's soul sea, instantly restoring peace to it.

The twisting and stabbing pain in his head was also instantly gone. He looked back with rapt attention, and discovered that the three gray vortexes were still spinning like giant grinding machines and unleashing an aura that could extinguish every soul they found.

"It's said that the Grand Soul Grinder is one of the Spirit God Sect's unique and extremely powerful magics, which is developed from certain bloodline magics of the Phantasms," Pei Qiqi explained without turning back to look at Nie Tian. "It's very impressive that you're able to resist the mighty fluctuations from the Grand Soul Grinder. I'm guessing many Tool Sect members are going to sustain severe soul injuries.

"Being pursued and surrounded by Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage disciples of the Spirit God Sect after sustaining such injuries, I wonder how many of them will survive."

Looking at her from behind, Nie Tian pondered briefly and said, "Can those Worldly realm and Greater Heaven stage Spirit God Sect disciples also use the Grand Soul Grinder?"

"Only Qi warriors with cultivation bases higher than the Worldly realm, which means they have transformed their psychic power into soul power, are able to learn and practice the Grand Soul Grinder," Pei Qiqi answered, still looking forward. "As long as we

don't run into any Worldly realm experts, I have confidence that I'll be able to get you out of this in this Lightning Shuttle. But if we're so unlucky that some Worldly realm experts make us their target, then..."

"I'll help you steer clear of them," Nie Tian blurted.

With these words, he no longer had any scruples, and instantly formed nine Heaven Eyes using his psychic power and soul power from the fragmentary stars in his soul.

Chapter 491: Soul Banner

Nie Tian unleashed his Heaven Eyes for the first time after entering this mysterious dimension.

The moment his nine Heaven Eyes came to form, the tips of his eyebrows rose, as he noticed that the perception of his Heaven Eyes was much keener here than in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

He looked up and saw countless stars in the sky. Hence, he made an attempt to practice the Fragmentary Star Incantation, then he instantly sensed with great clarity that copious amount of star power started to converge on him.

“There isn’t any spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth, nor sun or moon, just ever-shining stars...” He gradually realized that the enhancement of his Heaven Eyes’ perception might have something to do with the special environment of this dimension.

Even without the spiritual Qi of Heaven and Earth, he could practice the Fragmentary Star Incantation and obtain star power from the stars.

Slightly surprised by his new discovery, Nie Tian controlled his nine Heaven Eyes to fan out and fly ahead to secure a path for the Lightning Shuttle.

Soon, he caught sight of a large number of gray banners via his Heaven Eyes.

They were scattered on their path of escape, separated from each other by about a thousand meters.

Wiggling discarnate souls could be seen within each and every banner, which unleashed an intense thirst for blood.

As one of his Heaven Eyes approached one of the gray banners, the discarnate soul within the banner seemed to sense its existence and gave out an ear-piercing screech.

A Worldly realm Spirit God Sect Qi warrior rapidly flew over to the banner, standing atop a rock.

After a brief moment of bewilderment, Nie Tian realized what those banners were for, and thus instantly relocated that Heaven Eye.

“One of the Soul Banners just detected soul fluctuations right here.” The Spirit God Sect Qi warrior who had rushed over from the vicinity muttered to himself, frowning as he unleashed his soul awareness to scan the area carefully.

However, Nie Tian’s Heaven Eye had long since flown away. Therefore, after examining the area for some time, he failed to find any anomalies.

He shook his head, eyes filled with confusion, wondering what had just happened.

Meanwhile, Nie Tian’s eyebrows were knitted as he muttered to himself, “Banners that contain discarnate souls...”

“Found something?” Pei Qiqi asked with a soft voice.

With a grim face, Nie Tian explained, “There are a large number of gray banners floating ahead. Each of them contains a discarnate soul, which seems to be able to detect soul fluctuations. Those from the Spirit God Sect don’t have enough men to form a tight blockade to stop all of us from escaping so they’ve deployed lots of banners in every direction to trace our souls. Once we get close to any of them, those from the Spirit God Sect will be alarmed, and then come to intercept us.”

Pei Qiqi didn’t seem surprised at all. “Those banners are called Soul Banners, which are forged with unique methods by equipment forgers from the Spirit God Sect. The discarnate souls within those banners are able to detect any soul fluctuations around them with great precision. Any Qi warrior with a cultivation base lower than the Soul realm will be discovered when

they approach the Soul Banners.”

“Soul Banners...” Nie Tian muttered. “I saw nearly a hundred of them ahead of us, and those are only the ones I saw. We need to turn around and go in different direction.”

Pei Qiqi nodded. “Alright.”

The dashing Lightning Shuttle turned and headed in another direction.

Nie Tian’s Heaven Eyes changed directions accordingly, and continued to clear a path for the Lightning Shuttle.

It wasn’t long before more banners entered the Heaven Eyes’ perception range. Just like the ones they had encountered just now, they were also separated from each other by a thousand meters, covering a vast area.

There were about eighty of them, and they were detecting signs of soul fluctuations like scattered trees that had taken root in the void.

“It’s not working,” Nie Tian said with a grim look in his eyes. “There are more Soul Banners ahead. The moment we get close to them, those banners will send out signals. Nearby Spirit God Sect disciples will surely receive the signals and immediately try to block our path of escape.”

Pei Qiqi took a deep breath, and her Ethereal Swords appeared, floating around her. “If that’s the case, we have no choice but to forcibly charge through the blockade.”

Nie Tian shook his head. “If we do this, once we run into Worldly realm experts and get stalled, many more Spirit God Sect members will quickly gather around us. We need to come up with a proper plan.”

“What do you have in mind?” Pei Qiqi asked.

Nie Tian’s eyes lit up. “I actually have an idea! Later, I’ll try to

distract some of the Spirit God Sect experts. Then, I'll show you a direction that's safe. When the time is right, I'll tell you to sprint us forward."

"Okay," Pei Qiqi said with a soft voice.

Immediately afterwards, Nie Tian sat down, closed his eyes, and started meticulously manipulating his nine Heaven Eyes with his mind.

The nine Heaven Eyes spread out and shot towards different locations on the blockade formed by the Soul Banners at full speed.

As the Heaven Eyes approached, many Soul Banners started giving out sharp screeches.

A number of Spirit God Sect Qi warriors who had been waiting in the vicinity received the signals and rapidly gathered towards the Soul Banners that had given out screeches.

Meanwhile, the Heaven Eyes quickly changed directions and flew towards other locations, causing more Soul Banners to screech.

Soon, three Worldly realm and a handful of Greater Heaven Spirit God Sect disciples arrived and chased after the scattered Heaven Eyes.

Even though the Soul Banners could detect soul fluctuations, they couldn't tell whether the fluctuations were from living creatures with flesh and blood or other soul-possessing forms.

That was why the Soul Banners considered the wisps of soul power Nie Tian had used to form the Heaven Eyes to be soul-possessing lives with flesh and blood, and thus alarmed the nearby Spirit God Sect Qi warriors.

An explosive shout escaped Nie Tian's mouth. "Now! Go straight ahead!"

Pei Qiqi pressed her hands down on the prow of the Lightning Shuttle, blinding light bursting forth from within her palms.

Very subtle flesh power flowed out of her palms as the Lightning Shuttle shook violently for a few seconds before shooting forward with a speed that was twice as fast as before.

Nie Tian was inwardly shocked.

Meanwhile, he captured the faint flesh power exuding from Pei Qiqi's palms, from which he vaguely detected the same spatial energy that had wreathed the floating volcano.

He suspected that the strong boost in the Lightning Shuttle's speed stemmed from the faint flesh power exuded from Pei Qiqi's palms.

Before he could giving it more thought, the Lightning Shuttle reached the blockade formed by numerous Soul Banners. As soon as they did, the banners started giving out sharp screeches.

As the Lightning Shuttle dashed forward, more and more Soul Banners were triggered. Pei Qiqi didn't say a word, as she was concentrating on pushing the speed of the Lightning Shuttle to the limit.

Two Greater Heaven stage Spirit God Sect disciples flew over from another direction and stopped in Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi's path, each of them standing on a rock. "You can't run from us!"

SHEW! SHEW! SHEW!

One floating Ethereal Sword after another suddenly burst forward and vanished from Nie Tian's sight.

POOH!

By the time they reappeared, they had already pierced into the foreheads of the early and middle Greater Heaven stage Qi warriors, and in the next moment, shot out the backs of their heads.

As Pei Qiqi's slender fingers wove in the air, dazzlingly bright spatial energy blades quietly appeared around the two Spirit God

Sect Qi warriors, and rapidly cut their corpses into flying shreds.

As the Lightning Shuttle flew through their shredded bodies, Pei Qiqi made a grabbing motion in the air, and her Ethereal Swords disappeared into her cuff like lightning bolts.

More screeches rang out as the Lightning Shuttle whizzed by the Soul Banners at an alarming speed, and finally entered the vast open area where no banners could be seen.

Faint, angry roars of powerful Spirit God Sect experts rang out from far behind them. Apparently, their pursuit of Nie Tian's Heaven Eyes had turned out to be fruitless and, they had thus returned.

However, the Lightning Shuttle had already flown through the blockade formed by the Soul Banners and entered open areas that weren't controlled by those from the Spirit God Sect. As long as they couldn't quickly catch them within a very short time, they would most likely lose all traces of Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi.

Meanwhile, with his mind, Nie Tian controlled his Heaven Eyes to spread out further in all directions.

Seeing no Soul Banners after traveling for a while on the Lightning Shuttle, Nie Tian said, "We should be safe now.

"Even with the help of their Soul Banners, those from the Spirit God Sect don't have enough men to lock down a very large area. Now that we've left the Soul Banners' detection range, it means that they've completely lost track of us, and it'll be very difficult for them to find us again."

"Yeah." Pei Qiqi chimed in as she withdrew her hands from the prow of the Lightning Shuttle. She finally turned her head back to look at him, and said, "Thank you."

"You're much stronger than I remember," Nie Tian said.

Even though she was only at the middle Greater Heaven stage, Pei Qiqi had killed those two Greater Heaven stage Spirit God Sect

members with one clean move. They hadn't even had a chance to fight back.

The crushing strength she had displayed earlier shocked Nie Tian.

“Only after entering the Worldly realm will disciples of the Spirit God Sect start practicing all kinds of soul magics,” Pei Qiqi explained, looking as calm as ever. “Entering the Worldly realm marks the true transcendence of Spirit God Sect disciples. Those who haven't entered the Worldly realm haven't mastered any of the profound soul magics of the Spirit God Sect, so they are very easy to kill.”

Nie Tian looked deeply at her and said, “That's not it. Even though they hadn't reached the Worldly realm, they shouldn't have been killed with a single blow. Although I don't know what it is, I do know that you're different from before. You've become so much stronger that I can't fathom what's going on with you.”

“You're right. Something did happen to me.” Pei Qiqi didn't try to deny it, though she didn't want to give an explanation. “My cultivation has been progressing faster and more smoothly than before. Don't feel surprised. Perhaps I'll be able to enter the late Greater Heaven stage within a short time.”

After a moment of silence, Nie Tian suddenly asked, looking in her eyes, “Is that because your bloodline has awakened?”

Pei Qiqi shuddered slightly.

Chapter 492: Going Further into the Dimension

Leaning against the Lightning Shuttle, a cold light flashed across Pei Qiqi's bright eyes as she looked at Nie Tian and asked, "Why do you ask?"

Instead of answering right away, Nie Tian slowly sat down and said, "I don't know. It's just a feeling."

Back when Zhen Huilan had handed the Illusion Realm to her by the floating volcano, and her hands made contact with it, the same thing had happened.

According to Zhen Huilan, it was a powerful outsider, whose bloodline carried profound spatial power, that had created that huge hole in the volcano.

With the help of the Illusion Realm, she had stabilized the residue of that outsider's power, which had lingered on for tens of thousands of years.

However, as soon as Pei Qiqi had touched the Illusion Realm, the spatial energy wreathing the floating volcano had vanished.

Meanwhile, Pei Qiqi had closed her eyes and isolated herself from the outside world, as if she had begun to derive enlightenment from the profound mysteries within that spatial energy.

As that had happened, Nie Tian had shrewdly discovered that the aura she exuded was actually the mysterious essence of flesh power.

"A feeling?" Pei Qiqi snorted and turned back around. Putting her hands on the prow of the Lightning Shuttle, she said with her back towards Nie Tian, "So tell me what's your feeling about my master escaping from those men?"

Realizing that she was changing the topic, Nie Tian didn't pursue

it, but instead answered her question. “Your master is well-versed in spatial magics. If there are no mishaps, she should be able to escape, and those from the Spirit God Sect won’t be able to stop her.”

Pei Qiqi nodded gently. “I think so too.”

Afterwards, she fell silent and focused on steering the Lightning Shuttle as they traveled across this strange dimension.

Seeing that she wasn’t in the mood for talking, Nie Tian also settled down, assumed the lotus position, and started practicing cultivation with Star Stones under the starlit sky, where there was no sun or moon, just ever-shining stars.

As he absorbed star power from the Star Stones, he could sense with great clarity that starlight was being somehow channeled toward him from the depths of the boundless starry river.

For this reason, the speed at which he absorbed star power was greatly enhanced. Furthermore, as he practiced the Fragmentary Star Incantation, he was able to maintain his profound connection with his Heaven Eyes, which he had already summoned back.

While practicing cultivation, he was able to keep a close watch on everything happening in the vicinity via his Heaven Eyes.

Time flew. After an unknown period of time, the Lightning Shuttle started descending towards a very large, floating boulder.

As it did, Pei Qiqi took out her Sound Stone and attempted to contact Zhen Huilan.

Moments later, a hint of worry appeared in the depths of her eyes as she said, “Perhaps we’re too far from my master. I can’t seem to get in touch with her.”

Nie Tian awoke from his cultivation, looked up at her, and said, “Don’t worry. Her cultivation base is the same as those from the Spirit God Sect. Plus, even if her battle prowess turned out to be slightly inferior to those people, as a master of spatial magics, she

would enjoy an advantage if she was bent on escaping.”

He had realized this point from Zhao Shanling’s escape.

Relying on his profound spatial magics, the Soul realm Zhao Shanling had entered and left the Realm of Unbounded Desolation as he pleased. No one had been able to capture him.

Similarly, as his martial sister, Zhen Huilan should be able to escape the siege of other Profound realm experts with ease.

Pei Qiqi’s eyebrows furrowed. “It may not be as easy as you think. Since you don’t practice spatial power, you can’t feel the abnormality of this place. Even as skilled in wielding spatial power as my master is, it’ll be very difficult for her to create and enter a spatial portal in this strange dimension.”

Nie Tian’s expression flickered slightly. “Are you saying that Senior Zhen might be in danger? If that’s the case, how can we help her?”

Pei Qiqi let out a sigh. “There’s nothing we can do. Considering our cultivation bases, even if we circle back now, we won’t be able to provide her with any help, only burdens. When we left, master secretly sent me a message, telling me to take you and get as far away from the spatial rift through which we entered this dimension as possible.

“Master was certain that Yao Shou wasn’t lying. People from the Flame God Sect have probably already entered this dimension through that spatial rift.”

Nie Tian fell silent. Only after a while did he say, “It’s too bad that we don’t have a map of this place and we don’t know where we are. If we stray too far from that spatial rift, I fear we won’t be able to find our way back.”

“No need to worry about that,” Pei Qiqi said with a calm and composed expression. “I’ve made a map of the areas we’ve been to after coming here. And I have the coordinates of that spatial rift.

Wherever we go, we'll always be able to find our way back. That I can assure you."

Upon hearing her words, Nie Tian's eyes lit up.

After a moment of hesitation, Pei Qiqi added, "I probably can locate the largest floating continent. Earlier, I received some helpful information from the residual spatial energy surrounding that floating volcano. It's just that I haven't sorted through and fully understood the messages it carries."

A shudder ran through Nie Tian's body. "The spatial energy that an outsider left around that volcano carried some kind of information?"

Pei Qiqi nodded. "Very little, but yeah."

Before Nie Tian could ask another question, Pei Qiqi blurted, "Come on, let's go. I'll take you there."

After she laid some fresh spirit stones at the bottom of the Lightning Shuttle, it once again rose into the air with a whoosh.

Over the following days, Nie Tian no longer asked questions, but rather spent day and night absorbing star power from his Star Stones, refining his vortex of star power, and building up the lake of stardew at the bottom of the vortex.

According to some timer in Pei Qiqi's possession, one month passed without them noticing.

Thanks to the special environment, Nie Tian accumulated a copious amount of stardew at the bottom of his vortex of star power.

Gradually, it occurred to him that as long as he continued to practice in this strange dimension, it wouldn't be very long before he accumulated enough stardew for him to advance to the middle Greater Heaven stage.

Soon, another month passed.

They didn't encounter anyone on their way, and there was nothing special about the occasional floating boulders and lands they crossed.

Finally, one day, small adjustments seemed to be made to the direction the Lightning Shuttle was heading in.

Nie Tian scanned the vicinity and failed to find anything noteworthy.

However, soon afterwards, the Lightning Shuttle came to an area filled with floating boulders, lands, and old dead trees.

Each of the floating trees was hundreds of meters tall and the size of a small mountain.

With a brief glance, Nie Tian discovered that they were very similar to the ancient trees he had previously encountered in the magical place where wood power was almost as thick as water.

It was just that the floating, ancient trees he was seeing now were dead and withered away. Not a single leaf could be seen on their branches.

Perhaps that was why they weren't attacking him and Pei Qiqi as the Lightning Shuttle flew past them.

During the following few days, they saw more and more ancient trees on their way, as if they were entering a vast forest of them.

All of a sudden, a floating continent that seemed much vaster than the one they had arrived on entered Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi's view.

The continent was filled with the same type of trees they had encountered along their way here. However, these trees were alive, incomparably lush, and deeply rooted in every corner of the continent.

As the Lightning Shuttle flew closer to the continent, Nie Tian's vortex of wood power started to spin faster.

Not only that, but even the fragmented information he had formerly received from the titan started to realign at a faster speed.

It seemed that those pieces of information could be put back together and fly out of his vortex of wood power at any moment now.

“Let’s go over there and take a look,” Nie Tian said, pointing at the vast floating continent. “There seems to be wood power over there, which is pretty strange.”

Pei Qiqi’s pretty eyes lit up as she sent out her psychic awareness, then she exclaimed softly, “You’re right. There actually is wood power over there.”

They hadn’t discovered the least bit of spiritual power on any of the floating lands they had encountered on their way to this place.

Now that they had come to a special continent filled with incredibly tall and lush trees, as well as wood power, Pei Qiqi also seemed rather surprised. Without any delay, she steered the Lightning Shuttle toward it.

As they gradually descended from the sky, Nie Tian commanded his nine Heaven Eyes to spread out and fly into different parts of the floating continent.

The moment they landed, Nie Tian shuddered slightly. He lowered his voice and said, “There are people down there!”

Pei Qiqi’s eyes grew wide. “There are people here?”

Nie Tian nodded gently, signaling her to hold the Lightning Shuttle. Immediately afterwards, he carefully controlled his Heaven Eyes to conduct a more thorough scan.

Moments later, he found a few Qi warriors, who were dressed in the Poison Sect’s garments, roaming in the forest of sky-reaching trees.

“Poison Sect disciples,” Nie Tian said in a low voice.

“What are their cultivation bases?” Pei Qiqi asked without hesitation. “If their cultivation bases are much higher than ours, we need to leave immediately. We can’t let them discover us.”

Nie Tian was also surprised by his discoveries. “Strangely, their cultivation bases aren’t very high. The men I’ve seen so far are all at the Greater Heaven stage. Don’t tell me that they also had some unexpected encounters and got separated from their powerful experts.”

Upon hearing that the other party consisted of nothing but Greater Heaven stage cultivators, Pei Qiqi looked rather relieved as she asked, “How many?”

“Five. The one with the highest cultivation base is at the late Greater Heaven stage,” Nie Tian answered.

“Let’s go over there and take a look,” Pei Qiqi proposed.

“Alright.”

Chapter 493: Swarming Bugs

As they walked into the dense forest, Nie Tian scanned his surroundings with the help of his Heaven Eyes. At the same time, he sent a wisp of psychic awareness into his ring of holding.

He wanted to see if the Flame Dragon Armor had recovered its power and become usable again.

The Flame Dragon Armor was sitting quietly in his ring of holding. Sitting next to it, the prismatic fiery crystal had already lost ninety percent of the wisps of earthflame essence swimming inside it.

The Blood Core at the center of the chest area of the Flame Dragon Armor was still releasing misty, crimson light.

Strands of crimson light connected the Blood Core and the fiery crystal beside it. After a brief examination, Nie Tian discovered that the Flame Dragon Armor had recovered about half of its power by absorbing and refining earthflame essence from the fiery crystal.

As he attempted to communicate with the Flame Dragon Armor's soul, he instantly received a reply.

Hence, he realized that although it had only recovered half of its power, it had become usable now.

As a Spirit Channeling grade treasure, the Flame Dragon Armor was extremely helpful. Even though it hadn't been restored to its peak state, it would provide Nie Tian with significant assistance on various occasions.

His spirit was greatly lifted.

As a thought entered his mind, the Flame Star flew out of his ring of holding.

He reached out with one hand and assumed a tight grip on the

Flame Star. Immediately, different powers rushed out of the vortexes in his spiritual sea and infused into it.

As his spiritual power flowed through the numerous special spell formations engraved in the Flame Star, his spiritual power was further refined and concentrated, and became incomparably pure and sharp.

Blade light of various colors rose from the tip of the Flame Star, like a spiritual snake flicking its multi-colored tongue.

Among it, a streak of green light appeared especially active.

“Yee?!” Surprised, Nie Tian stared blankly at the streak of green light, and instantly recognized that it was a streak of wood power.

The streak of wood power wiggled unceasingly, as if it were eager to break free from the combined blade light and fly towards the sky-reaching trees in the surroundings.

Curious and puzzled, Nie Tian glanced around at the ancient trees.

Each and every one of them was lush and hundreds of meters tall. Even the shortest one seemed no shorter than five hundred meters. Standing among them, he looked very tiny.

Fairly rich wood power started exuding from the branches and leaves of the huge trees around him, and started converging on him, as if it were attracted by that streak of wood power in the blade light.

He sent a wisp of his psychic awareness into his vortex of wood power, and discovered that the fragmented will he had received from the titan was rapidly gathering and reforming within his madly spinning vortex of wood power.

Hence, he became absorbed in his thoughts.

Compared to the wood power in the magical place where he had discovered a Tree of Life, the wood power on this floating

continent was much fainter.

But even still, the wood power here was richer than any other place he had been to in the Domain of the Falling Stars.

After his previous trip to the magical place where a Tree of Life existed, he had absorbed enough pure wood power, and his vortex of wood power had already reached the point where it was ready for his breakthrough into the middle Greater Heaven stage.

Perhaps the reason why he induced such interactions between the ancient trees in this place and himself was because he had previously absorbed a copious amount of wood power from the magical place where the same type of ancient trees grew.

“I wonder whether it’ll trigger any changes if I launch attacks with my wood power.” With this thought in mind, he led Pei Qiqi deeper into the forest.

At this moment, Pei Qiqi had long since stored the Lightning Shuttle back in her ring of holding, and her slender physique was surrounded by multiple layers of rippling spatial energy.

As far as Nie Tian sensed it, Pei Qiqi seemed to have vanished from his side and entered a different space, making her completely undetectable by psychic awareness.

Since he was no stranger to Pei Qiqi’s mysterious abilities, he didn’t feel very surprised.

Some time passed...

Nie Tian came to a stop by the foot of a huge tree and said softly, “They’re right ahead.”

Three Heaven Eyes floated over the region ahead of them, where he could see five men and women dressed in the Poison Sect’s garments sitting in a circle and chatting in low voices.

As they chatted with their faces full of smiles, Nie Tian moved his Heaven Eyes to get a full grasp of the content of their

conversations.

Eyes narrowed, Nie Tian explained to Pei Qiqi as he listened to their conversation intently, “Those five are one of the Poison Sect’s search teams. They’ve recently discovered this strange continent and already sent word to the others. Now they’re waiting for the arrival of their powerful experts.”

Pei Qiqi’s expression instantly changed as she asked, “They’re waiting for others to come?”

Nie Tian nodded.

“Experts from the Poison Sect are beyond powerful. Even if just one Worldly realm expert comes here, we’ll be in huge trouble.” With these words, Pei Qiqi rapidly calmed herself and gave up the idea of going deeper into the forest. “We can’t stay here, and we need to leave as soon as possible. Also, we’ve got to keep an eye out for Poison Sect members that are coming here upon receiving their message.”

Nie Tian seemed somewhat hesitant.

There was something special about this continent. His vortex of wood power had accelerated, as well as the reintegration of the titan’s broken will.

He had always wondered what mysteries were lying within the titan’s broken will. If they remained on this continent, it would take three days at the most for all of the broken pieces of information to fully reintegrate and present the truth to him.

Three days was all he needed.

However, powerful experts from the Poison Sect might very well arrive here within three days upon receiving the message sent by the search team of five resting ahead of them.

After wrestling with indecision for a while, he eventually decided to play it safe, then he said, “Alright, let’s go back to where we came from.”

Pei Qiqi let out a sigh of relief and said, “Good. That’s the wise thing to do.” She had worried that Nie Tian would act rashly and put the two of them in danger.

However, just as Nie Tian was about to turn around and head back, he heard another piece of information via his Heaven Eyes.

Sitting among the ancient trees, a slightly chubby young man with a gracious face lowered the Sound Stone in his hand and said with furrowed eyebrows, “There’s something strange about this place. I can’t seem to get the message through to the others. He Xue, why don’t you make a message run? Get away from this continent and find a place where you can get the message through to our seniors.”

The Poison Sect disciple named He Xu rose to his feet. “No problem, Big Brother Zhang Jiu. You guys be careful.”

A bright smile appeared on Zhang Jiu’s harmless face as he said, “There’s not a soul here other than the five of us. What’s there to worry about?”

“Well, you’re probably right.” With these words, He Xu left the group and marched towards the edge of the floating continent.

The direction he was heading in didn’t deviate far from where Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi were.

After Nie Tian relayed their conversation to Pei Qiqi, she hastily tried using her own Sound Stone. Immediately afterwards, her eyes lit up. “He’s right. Sound Stones don’t seem to work here. That means they’re relying on that man to leave this continent to get word of their discovery through to their seniors. If that’s the case, we’re not in a hurry to leave anymore...”

Soon, she came up with an idea, and said to Nie Tian, “You stay here. I’ll go take care of that messenger.”

Nie Tian nodded.

The messenger, He Xu, possessed the lowest cultivation base

among the five Poison Sect disciples. If there weren't any mishaps, he wouldn't even stand a chance fighting Pei Qiqi, so Nie Tian wasn't worried.

Watching Pei Qiqi going stealthily in the direction he had pointed out for her, he stood in place by the foot of a huge tree.

He continued to pay close attention to the movement and conversations between the other four.

Smiles filled the corner of Zhang Jiu's mouth as he said, "Our powerful seniors are coming soon. Let's not just sit around and do nothing while we wait. This place is wreathed in wood power. All of these ancient trees must also contain copious amounts of wood power. I bet our spirit vermin can feast on them."

With these words, the slightly chubby Zhang Jiu rose to his feet. As the ring of holding on his finger flickered brightly, countless bugs swarmed out of it and swooped towards nearby trees.

The other three followed suit and cast the Poison Sect's unique magic to unleash the spirit vermin they had refined.

Shortly, the surroundings of the four Poison Sect disciples were filled with extremely active flying bugs.

Via his Heaven Eyes, Nie Tian saw that the bugs were of various sizes. Some were the size of fists, while others were the size of grains, but upon closer examination, all of them looked sinister and had sharp teeth.

Without any hesitation, they swarmed towards the nearby ancient trees and started gnawing away on the freshly-green leaves and branches.

The excited noises of the bugs made Nie Tian's hair stand on end. Under the gaze of his Heaven Eyes, the leaves and branches of the nearby trees rapidly disappeared.

Some of the bugs even flew towards his hiding place. As they approached, they seemed to notice his existence, and thus started

to give out ear-piercing noises.

Upon hearing the bugs' strange shrieks, Zhang Jiu's peaceful face instantly changed as he called out, "Who's hiding there?"

Upon uttering these words, he morphed into a giant bird and pounced towards Nie Tian's location.

The expressions of the other three Poison Sect disciples also turned cold as they each gave a cold harrumph and began forming hand seals. As soon as they did, countless bugs flew directly towards Nie Tian's hiding place like swarms of locusts.

"Spirit vermin!" Nie Tian let out a cold snort and stepped out from behind the thick tree trunk. Eyes filled with frosty light, he glared at the incoming swarms of sinister bugs.

Chapter 494: Life Drain

Zhang Jiu, the leader of the Poison Sect search team, was only at the middle Greater Heaven stage.

The other three were one male and two females. The man, who looked older than the others, was at the late Greater Heaven stage.

Both of the two females were at the middle Greater Heaven stage and had curvaceous bodies and young, pretty faces.

As soon as their bugs detected the aura of Nie Tian's flesh and blood, the four of them almost simultaneously locked down on Nie Tian's hiding place and dashed over after their spirit vermin.

The gentle-looking Zhang Jiu was the leader of this searching team because of his extraordinary talent and strong backers in the Poison Sect.

He flashed past ancient trees and stopped before Nie Tian, who was now surrounded by countless bugs.

His eyes ran up and down Nie Tian. Surprised to find no sigil on his garments, he asked, "Who are you?"

Before entering this dimension, the major sects from all over the Domain of the Falling Stars had already cleared the entire mountain range together.

All of the local powers and independent Qi warriors had been driven out of the mountain range or annihilated.

It was very unlikely that someone could have escaped their joint operation and entered this dimension through one of the six spatial rifts.

However, the garments Nie Tian was wearing didn't belong to any of the major foreign sects, which somewhat surprised him.

Enveloped by his chaotic magnetic field, Nie Tian's expression remained as calm as ever as he watched tens of thousands of bugs

swarming around him.

He repeatedly swung the Flame Star in the air, unleashing numerous, dazzling blade lights.

Many spirit vermin gave out sharp shrieks and dropped to the ground.

The spirit vermin Zhang Jiu and the others had refined seemed to be greatly affected and started to fly very slowly when they entered the chaotic magnetic field.

Nie Tian's blade lights tangled up and formed dense grids that filled his entire chaotic magnetic field.

Even the smallest bug couldn't fly past them to attack Nie Tian .

Watching their spirit vermin fall to the ground, Zhang Jiu shook his head slightly and said, "Since you refuse to state your identity, don't blame us for what we're going to do to you!

"Crimson Chain Snake!" With these words, a small, red snake that was half a meter long and the girth of a finger suddenly flew out of Zhang Jiu's palm.

Unlike normal snakes, this small snake was semi-translucent, like a red gem. Its beady eyes shone with suffocating light as it flew towards Nie Tian.

As Nie Tian watched the incoming snake, the nine fragmentary stars suddenly started shining brightly over Nie Tian's soul sea.

One wisp of bloodthirsty aura after another burst forth from within the Crimson Chain Snake's eyes and stealthily invaded Nie Tian's soul.

With an exclamation, Nie Tian suddenly realized that the soul shadow of the Crimson Chain Snake had appeared out of nowhere within his soul.

"This spirit vermin can actually attack my soul!"

Shocked, Nie Tian no longer dared to treat it lightly, and hastily

morphed his psychic awareness into a large saber that resembled the Flame Star.

With a crushing force, the saber slashed down on the Crimson Chain Snake's soul shadow.

However, the Crimson Chain Snake's soul shadow instantly split into a large number of slender spiritual snakes.

Simultaneously, the Crimson Chain Snake in the real world entered Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field.

As soon as it did, the bugs Zhang Jiu had previously sent into the chaotic magnetic field seemed to be inspired by their leader, and instantly became fiercer and more active.

Some of the smallest bugs squeezed their way through the very tiny spaces between Nie Tian's tightly-woven blade lights and began to attack him.

After passing through Nie Tian's defenses, the small bugs all seemed extremely excited. Each of their devilish eyes shone with an unending desire for flesh and blood.

Zhang Jiu's expression flickered. Eyes brimming with ecstasy, he said, "This guy carries very rich and refined flesh power! All of my spirit vermin that passed through his defenses turned from active to mad!"

Overjoyed, Wu Cui, the girl in a long emerald dress, exclaimed, "Is he a freak who focuses on the refinement of flesh and blood?"

Eyes lit up, Luo Ting, the girl in red dress, said with a bright smile, "It seems so. We're so in luck. My little scorpion loves nothing better than the flesh and blood of humans who refine their bodies."

With these words, a green string shot out from her palm, which rapidly morphed into a green scorpion that was the size of a fist.

At first glance, it seemed as if it had been carved out of a piece of

emerald, almost too exquisite to be real.

However, its beady eyes were blood-red, and brimmed with a strong thirst for flesh and blood.

It shot into Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field and sprayed a cloud of toxic mist out of its mouth, as if it weren't affected by the distorting force within the chaotic magnetic field.

In the blink of an eye, the green mist pervaded a ten meter radius around Nie Tian.

A numbing toxin seemed to be quietly invading Nie Tian's flesh and blood.

Engulfed by the toxic mist, Nie Tian felt a burning sensation from his exposed skin, as if it were being burned by fierce sunlight.

Meanwhile, as his blood and aura circulated, he started to experience mild pain inside of him.

That was when he realized that the toxic mist unleashed by the scorpion was causing slow damage to his flesh and blood.

With a cold snort, he instantly shifted away from his original place.

As soon as he left the area where the toxic mist pervaded, he practiced the Fragmentary Star Incantation to stimulate the might of the nine fragmentary stars in his soul.

Beams of chilly starlight poured down from the void over his soul sea. The numerous slender Crimson Chain Snakes, which were attempting to devour his soul, were instantly slashed into shreds by the dazzling saber formed by Nie Tian's psychic awareness and soul power.

The shredded Crimson Chain Snakes rapidly dissipated.

Zhang Jiu's face turn pale with fright. "There's something special about this guy! He's only at the Greater Heaven stage, but the refinement of his soul has already reached such a high level! He

eliminated my Crimson Chain Snake's soul attack without breaking a sweat!"

At the same time, Luo Ting exclaimed, "The refinement of his flesh and blood is also very shocking! There's something weird about him. Quit playing everyone. Let's finish him off quickly!"

At first, they had taken Nie Tian for someone they could have some fun with before killing. But now, seeing that not only had the Crimson Chain Snake failed to shatter his soul, but it had also sustained injuries itself, they all started to treat Nie Tian seriously.

Even the only late Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciple stopped being an onlooker and unleashed his most powerful spirit vermin.

A brown centipede shot out with a sharp shriek and almost instantly entered Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field.

Eyebrows furrowed, Wu Cui unleashed her most powerful spirit vermin, a black bee.

In the next moment, the Crimson Chain Snake, the green scorpion, the brown centipede, and the black bee entered Nie Tian's chaotic magnetic field at the same time. They were significantly larger than all the other spirit vermin, and didn't seem to be affected by the magnetic field at all.

Because they were the leaders of the other spirit vermin, as soon as they let out sharp shrieks, the tiny spirit vermin that had squeezed through the grids of blade lights began biting hard on Nie Tian's shoulders.

The soreness and stabbing pain made Nie Tian frown, but at that very moment, an idea occurred to him.

All of a sudden, he dropped his defenses altogether and sat down on the ground, as if he were deeply poisoned.

"He's poisoned!" Wu Cui exclaimed, overjoyed.

Immediately afterwards, the sky-filling spirit vermin swarmed on him, along with the red snake, green scorpion, brown centipede, and black bee.

In a split second, Nie Tian, who was sitting in the lotus position, was covered by a thick layer of spirit vermin.

At first glance, Nie Tian looked like a lamb being gnawed by countless flesh-eating vermin.

Soreness and stabbing pain came from every inch of Nie Tian's skin, which almost caused him to scream out loud.

Meanwhile, he could sense with great clarity that his flesh power was also quickly being sucked away from him.

At that moment, Nie Tian snorted coldly and thought to himself, "Bloodline talent: Life Drain!"

In the next moment, the numerous crystal-like chains within the green aura in his heart started to shine with blinding light.

The green spots within those crystal-like chains seemed to be realigning to reveal the Life Drain bloodline talent. One wisp of Nie Tian's flesh power after another suddenly shot towards the countless spirit vermin that were clinging to him like fishing lines.

Even finer than hair, the wisps of flesh power, which were branded with the Life Drain bloodline talent, caused explosive effects the moment they pierced into the spirit vermin bodies.

Every spirit vermin that was now biting Nie Tian's flesh and sucking his blood let out terrified, blood-curdling shrieks.

However, ecstasy appeared in the depths of Nie Tian's eyes.

Like tubes that connected the spirit vermin and Nie Tian, the countless wisps of flesh power started to forcibly suck the life force out of the spirit vermin.

Even though the spirit vermin seemed insignificant individually, each and every one of them contained surprisingly rich flesh

power, especially the four larger ones.

Based on Nie Tian's senses, the flesh power they carried wasn't any less than that of fourth grade spirit beasts'.

Pooh! Pooh! Pooh!

Numerous small spirit vermin were quickly drained of all their flesh power, and their shriveled bodies fell to the ground like rain.

Tens of thousands of wisps of flesh power flew back to Nie Tian's heart, where they were devoured by the green bloodline aura and became its nourishment.

Muffled groans escaped the mouths of Zhang Jiu and the other Poison Sect disciples, their faces turning pale.

The same fearful look that appeared in the spirit vermin's eyes appeared in their eyes as well, as if they were crying in their hearts for all of their spirit vermin to leave Nie Tian alone and return to them.

At this moment, they stared at Nie Tian like they were staring at some evil spirit.

WHOOSH!

Pei Qiqi returned. The moment she saw Nie Tian, a soft exclamation escaped her mouth.

In her eyes, Nie Tian, who was now deeply covered in spirit vermin, looked like a man made of bugs, and very scary.

She thought Nie Tian had been poisoned and had his flesh and blood gnawed away. She thought he was a lost cause.

Just as she was about to drive away the spirit vermin, she saw Nie Tian's bug-covered face split into a smile.

Zhang Jiu and the others stood aghast, their expressions looking as if they had seen a ghost in broad daylight.

"T-this guy..." Sensing the fear and weakening life aura from her

spirit vermin, Wu Cui stammered and failed to even get a whole sentence out.

Bewildered by the scene, Zhang Jiu quickly came back to his senses and shouted, “Let’s get out of here and inform our seniors!

The other three also snapped back to their senses and rapidly sped away in different directions.

Even though their spirit vermin, which let out miserable shrieks unceasingly, also wanted to escape, they were bound by wisps of Nie Tian’s flesh power, and couldn’t move even the slightest bit.

Chapter 495: Infiltration of Toxins

Upon seeing Pei Qiqi's arrival, Zhang Jiu instantly gave up on the idea of killing Nie Tian, and decided to withdraw.

After all, he didn't know if there were still others who had come to this floating continent together with Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi.

He was also worried that powerful Worldly realm or Profound realm experts would arrive within a short time.

The four larger spirit vermin had profound connections with the four of them. As they were bent on leaving, they each summoned their spirit vermin with their minds, commanding them to leave with them.

However, even though their spirit vermin heard the summons of their souls, they could only let out even sadder shrills. Not one of them was able to break free from the binds of Nie Tian's flesh power.

Zhang Qiu and the other three simultaneously fled in four different directions, repeatedly looking over their shoulders as they did.

Sitting upright by the foot of an ancient tree, Nie Tian grinned somewhat scarily. As he shook his shoulders, numerous dead small bugs fell to the ground.

Meanwhile, the Crimson Chain Snake, brown centipede, green scorpion, and black bee seemed as if they were clamped by Nie Tian's flesh.

As hard as they tried to return to their masters, they couldn't.

Due to the activation of Life Drain, wisps of Nie Tian's flesh power, which were even finer than hair, pierced into them and held them down like sharp hooks.

The pure and rich flesh power within the four spirit vermin

poured madly into Nie Tian's body like a flood rushing through a shattered watergate.

“Why the rush? I'm not done playing yet.” Grinning, Nie Tian shook himself briefly, and more small bugs fell to the ground.

Every one of them had been drained of every last shred of flesh power, and looked like dried-up meat that had been left in fierce sunlight for years. Not the slightest sign of life could be sensed from them.

One after another, wisps of refined flesh power flowed back to Nie Tian's heart, where they were greedily absorbed by the green aura.

Wreathed in rich flesh power, Nie Tian expelled all of the spirit vermin's venom and toxins from his system.

Feeling full of vigor, Nie Tian charged towards the late Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciple with a scary grin on his face.

Pei Qiqi, who had returned after killing the Poison Sect messenger, was taken aback upon seeing that Nie Tian was completely unaffected by the four spirit vermin clinging to him. Her bright eyes flickered as she saw Nie Tian charge towards an enemy like a tiger pouncing on its prey.

After a moment of bewilderment, she hastily formed exquisite hand seals.

In the next moment, two spatial energy wards suddenly came to form in Wu Cui and Luo Ting's paths of escape like two thin layers of rippling water.

Wu Cui and Luo Ting ran into the wards headfirst, and with a violent shake, they both disappeared.

Meanwhile, Ethereal Swords shot out of Pei Qiqi's cuff as she charged towards Zhang Jiu, not paying any further attention to Wu Cui and Luo Ting.

Both she and Nie Tian knew that if any of the four escaped from them and sent word to their seniors, they would end up in huge trouble.

That was why they had exchanged a glance and reached a mutual understanding right before they launched counterattacks: none of these Poison Sect disciples would live.

SHEW!

Nie Tian kept a watch on Wu Cui and Luo Ting with his Heaven Eyes as he chased after the late Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciple.

He saw with great clarity that the two of them tumbled into the wards of spatial energy, and thus were now trapped within the wards.

Their expressions flickered drastically as they searched for a way to get out of there.

They unleashed various incantations and rushed about non-stop, but still couldn't find a way to break free from Pei Qiqi's spatial wards.

The fact that they couldn't escape from Pei Qiqi's restriction magic even though they were both at the middle Greater Heaven stage proved how unfathomable Pei Qiqi's strength had become.

BOOM! BOOM!

The green scorpion and black bee were drained of flesh power and fell off Nie Tian's shoulders. Their shriveled bodies crashed to the ground.

As they did, Nie Tian observed Wu Cui and Luo Ting via his Heaven Eyes, and discovered that their faces had turned even more ghastly.

The scorpion and bee were their spirit vermin, which had profound connections with them. The deaths of the scorpion and

bee seemed to have made them suffer a backlash.

“Such rich flesh power!” Sensing the excitement of the green aura in his heart, Nie Tian smiled heartily and cast a short-range Starshift.

A streak of dazzling starlight flashed past, and Nie Tian appeared in front of the fleeing late Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciple, holding his Flame Star.

Sha Cheng stopped his dashing momentum and said, “Don’t push me, brat!”

With the Crimson Chain Snake and the brown centipede dangling on his waist, Nie Tian grinned and said, “Well, I am pushing you. What can you do about it?”

As he spoke, he kept a close watch on the overall situation with the help of his nine Heaven Eyes in the vicinity.

Wu Cui and Luo Ting, who were trapped by Pei Qiqi’s spatial magic, sustained injuries to their souls due to the deaths of their spirit vermin, and became increasingly anxious.

From the look of it, there was no way that they could burst out of those spatial wards created by Pei Qiqi.

Meanwhile, Pei Qiqi had already caught up to Zhang Jiu, and the two of them were now engaged in a fierce battle.

According to his understanding of Pei Qiqi’s battle prowess, it was very unlikely that an opponent at the same cultivation stage as her would beat her in a battle.

In addition, He Xu, the messenger, had long since been killed by Pei Qiqi. Therefore, as long as he could silence Sha Cheng, they wouldn’t need to worry about word of what happened here leaking anymore.

Not only did the spirit vermin that belonged to Zhang Jiu and Sha Cheng fail to struggle free from Nie Tian’s constraint, but they

were also rapidly losing their flesh power due to the effect of Life Drain.

It wouldn't be long before they were drained of their flesh power and died.

Since Wu Cui and Luo Ting had sustained injuries because of the deaths of their spirit vermin, Zhang Jiu and Sha Cheng would probably also sustain injuries when their spirit vermin died.

With this thought in mind, Nie Tian became even more relieved.

Sha Cheng let out a sigh and said, "Very well. Whether your seniors are somewhere on this floating continent or not, I shall teach you a lesson. I really don't know where you got the courage to stand in my way when you're only at the early Greater Heaven stage."

In fact, he wasn't in a hurry to leave because he feared Nie Tian, but rather, was afraid that more powerful experts were on their way to this place.

Every team that had entered this dimension through one of the six spatial rifts had a few powerful seniors on their team. In Sha Cheng's eyes, others on Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi's side would most likely arrive soon.

For that reason, he hadn't wanted to waste his time fighting Nie Tian. He knew that by doing so, he might put himself in danger. However, he eventually embraced his killing nature after being provoked by Nie Tian.

"Poison Sect forbidden technique: Spirit Vermin Self-destruction!" With these words, the vague soul shadow of a brown centipede suddenly surfaced in the depths of Sha Cheng's pupils. It twisted madly about, as if it were lit up by some kind of power and became demented.

Nie Tian's eyes widened as the brown centipede, which had bitten into the side of his waist, let out an ear-piercing shriek.

The moment the shriek echoed out, the brown centipede vibrated briefly, and then exploded with a loud boom.

The strong explosive force instantly sent a large amount of toxins into Nie Tian's flesh and blood.

Sha Cheng thrust all of the brown centipede's toxins and its last remaining power into Nie Tian's internal organs at the expense of its life.

Heart-wrenching pain came from Nie Tian's insides. He examined himself with his mind, and discovered that the brown toxins had already dispersed into his five yin organs and six yang organs.

The toxins looked like tiny earthworms that carried intense, foul smells.

Feeling sore and aching all over, Nie Tian felt as if even his mind had become dull because of the toxins in him.

BOOM!

Almost simultaneously, the explosion of the brown centipede caused the Crimson Chain Snake to explode and die.

The moment it did, a bloody mist sprayed all over Nie Tian, along with the toxins it carried, causing his exposed skin to burn.

"Sha Cheng! Are you trying to kill me?!" Zhang Jiu's explosive roar echoed out from afar.

As the Crimson Chain Snake died, Zhang Jiu seemed to suffer a strong blow. One of the Ethereal Swords slashed down from midair and cut off a piece of his flesh.

"Your Crimson Chain Snake was going to die anyway. It might as well cause some damage with its death." With these words, Sha Cheng muttered something before taking out three green arrows and flinging them towards Nie Tian.

The three green arrows morphed into three wisps of smoke as

they traveled ethereally in the air. They were aimed at Nie Tian's neck and eyes.

Nie Tian, who was feeling light-headed from the toxins, had difficulty summoning his spiritual power.

The blade light of the Flame Star constantly flickered, as he had already lost control of the three types of power he had infused into it.

“You asked for this,” Sha Cheng said with a cold face.

Chapter 496: Efforts in Vain

As the three small, green arrows shot towards Nie Tian like three wisps of ethereal smoke, loud rolls of thunder rang out in Nie Tian's ears.

In the meantime, incomparably strong spiritual power burst forth from within them. Even though they were still a long way from Nie Tian, his eyes were already starting to hurt.

He instantly had an idea as to how mighty the arrows were.

Feeling a sense of urgency, he hastily tried to summon power from his spiritual sea, yet he discovered that he couldn't draw any power from his vortex of star power and vortex of flame power.

His vortex of wood power was the only one that didn't seem to be affected, and was still spinning at a high speed.

Glittering, green spots could be seen floating at the bottom of the vortex of wood power, which carried the broken will of a titan.

WHOOSH!

Pure and rich liquidized wood power rushed out of his vortex of wood power and poured into his meridians like numerous green streams.

In the next moment, streams of misty, green light started to rise from within Nie Tian, which rapidly swirled around and eventually enveloped him.

It was as if the misty green light had formed a emerald pagoda over Nie Tian.

All of a sudden, the nearby ancient trees seemed to be attracted to Nie Tian. Wisps of freshly-green wood power started to converge on and infuse into him.

After receiving wood power from the vicinity, the emerald light swirling around Nie Tian started to shine increasingly dazzlingly,

causing Nie Tian, who was bathed in rich wood power, to feel full of vigor.

Sha Cheng's three small arrows, which were wreathed in cyan lightning, bombarded the layer of misty, emerald light around Nie Tian.

PUFF! PUFF! PUFF!

The green arrows instantly exploded, sending out wisps of toxins and lightning that intended to penetrate the thick layer of defensive light.

However, as powerful as they were, their efforts turned out to be in vain.

In the meantime, Nie Tian was struck by a clear feeling that he was being nourished by the rich wood power within the layer of emerald light around him.

Wood power and flesh power he had absorbed from the spirit vermin swam around among his internal organs, helping him neutralize the toxins.

He examined himself with a wisp of soul power, which he extracted from the fragmentary stars, and discovered that the strands of brown toxins were fading away from his internal organs, and the Crimson Chain Snake's poisonous blood on his skin was also disappearing.

Meanwhile, the sore and powerless sensations he had been feeling were also greatly relieved, along with the mind-numbing dizziness.

Furthermore, the various vortexes within his spiritual sea, which seemed to have temporarily stopped, returned to normal again, and the various types of power were once again at his command.

All of a sudden, a vigorous life force brimmed in his heart, causing his heart to race.

As the numerous slim, crystal-like chains within the green aura shone with dazzling and mysterious light, a wave of unfathomable energy fluctuations spread out from Nie Tian's heart.

Immediately, all of his powerless and negative sensations were swept away.

No longer affected by the toxins left in him by the spirit vermin, he felt as if he were vested with a profound force. With a swing of his Flame Star, he shot its blade light of three powers straight forward with a momentum that could sever everything in its way.

Wherever the blade light extended, the earth cracked open, and crackling sounds filled the air.

Sha Cheng's expression flickered drastically as he hastily formed hand seals. Thunder and lightning instantly wreathed and filled the space between his palms. A moment later, a large, translucent centipede came to form in the air before him.

The centipede was almost identical to the one that had just exploded and died. The only difference was that it was many times larger.

As soon as it appeared, it started to twist about, giving rise to flickering lightning and rumbling thunder.

The floating, intangible centipede glared at Nie Tian, as if it were going to unleash some sort of psychic attack.

However, before it could form any magics, the Flame Star's blade light whizzed over and bombarded its head.

The centipede, which Sha Cheng had formed with the Poison Sect's secret magic using his psychic power, spiritual power, and poisons, was instantly cut in half from head to tail.

Sha Cheng's eyes dimmed slightly as he coughed up a mouthful of blood. Then, he shot a nasty glower at Nie Tian.

However, as his blood spilled on the split centipede, the two

halves of its body morphed into two new centipedes, which became active and restless again.

Sha Cheng seemed to realized that Nie Tian wasn't so easily dealt with. Fearing that others might come to his aid, he once again decided to leave.

He released a thick, brown smoke, enveloping him and filling his path of escape. Soon, he disappeared from Nie Tian's sight.

The two newly-formed centipedes seemed to be vested with new, extra life power from Sha Cheng's blood. Their intangible bodies solidified as they shot madly towards Nie Tian.

Nie Tian let out a cold harrumph and launched another short-range Starshift, turning a blind eye to the two incoming centipedes.

A streak of starlight flashed by, and the next moment, he appeared within the grayish-brown smoke unleashed by Sha Cheng. His vision was compromised, preventing him from getting a clear view of everything around him.

Even his Heaven Eyes, which were floating high in the sky, were temporarily blocked by the grayish-brown smoke. He could only see via his Heaven Eyes that a line of smoke stretched far into the distance, but he couldn't see through the smoke and locate Sha Cheng.

By the time Nie Tian enhanced the perception of his Heaven Eyes with more soul power from the fragmentary stars and determined Sha Cheng's location, he had already reached the edge of the floating continent.

Hence, Nie Tian launched another short-range Starshift, and arrived behind him.

However, just as Nie Tian was about to launch an attack, another Poison Sect disciple rushed over from the void, treading on a sizable rock.

Nie Tian's expression flickered as he instantly stopped his dashing momentum and turned around.

That Poison Sect disciple was at the middle Worldly realm. He thundered while dashing towards the floating continent, "How dare you!!"

BOOM!

As he approached the continent, the rock he stood on suddenly exploded.

Meanwhile, he seemed to have flown into an enormous, invisible ward, and instantly bounced back, blood flowing out of the corner of his mouth.

"What the...." Confusion filled the man's face as he stared at the floating continent before him, and didn't dare to make another attempt.

Sha Cheng finally charged out of his grayish-brown smoke and flew to the man's side. Panting heavily, he said, "Senior Martial Brother Sun, two strangers are chasing and killing our disciples down there! He Xu has probably died already. We didn't think the situation was in our favor, and so we ran."

Sun Xuan's face turned as grim as piece of steel as he asked, "Where's Zhang Jiu? Is he okay?"

"Umm... I think he's fine." Sha Cheng sounded hesitant.

Sun Xuan snorted coldly and exclaimed, "There seems to be a special ward around this floating continent, which is stopping me from entering! Sha Cheng, you must know how important Zhang Qiu is to our sect. Now, circle back and get him out of there! Nothing can happen to him!"

Sha Cheng bowed his head and said, "Alright."

With these words, he, who had already sustained injuries, unleashed his psychic awareness to determine Zhang Jiu's current

location, while he circled around the floating continent at full speed.

Hundreds of meters beneath them, Nie Tian, who was planning to run away, stopped.

He had caught every word of the conversation between Sha Cheng and Sun Xuan with the help of his Heaven Eyes. He had also witnessed Sun Xuan bouncing back on his way towards him. Sun Xuan even seemed to have sustained injuries from it.

After a moment of pondering, he suddenly realized that there must be some sort of barrier around this floating continent, where he and Pei Qiqi were free to travel about.

They hadn't run into that barrier, nor had Zhang Jiu, Sha Cheng, and the other Poison Sect disciples, which meant that barrier didn't have any restrictive effect on Greater Heaven stage cultivators.

However, the barrier would prevent those with cultivation bases higher than the Greater Heaven stage from entering.

At that moment, via his Heaven Eyes, which were scattered and covered a large area around him, Nie Tian caught sight of a few other Poison Sect disciples approaching from the distant void.

He had originally planned to leave this floating continent as soon as possible. However, after pondering the situation for a moment, he came up with a new plan.

Eyes fixed on Sun Xuan, he slowly stepped backwards to hide himself in the dense forest. Then, via his Heaven Eyes, he discovered to his surprise that Pei Qiqi had failed to finish off Zhang Jiu.

Even though his life-spirit vermin, the Crimson Chain Snake, had died, he had somehow broken away from Pei Qiqi.

As Pei Qiqi chased him to the edge of the floating continent, she seemed to also notice the Poison Sect reinforcements, and thus

withdrew, calling out, “Mu Han!”

Nie Tian rushed towards her without hesitation.

Moments later, they reunited in the depths of the dense forest, where he found Wu Cui and Luo Ting’s corpses, which both had blood on their necks and foreheads.

Pei Qiqi summoned her Lightning Shuttle and urged Nie Tian to jump on board. “People from the Poison Sect are coming for us. We need to leave now.”

Nie Tian shook his head. “No, we can’t leave this floating continent. Powerful experts from the Poison Sect are closing in on this continent. If we leave this place, they’ll surely chase us down and kill us. But if we stay, we might have a chance at surviving.”

“What are you talking about?!” Pei Qiqi exclaimed. “We’ll be doomed if we stay here!”

“This continent is very special.” Nie Tian hastily explained. “Apparently, only Greater Heaven stage cultivators can set foot on it. I just witnessed a Worldly realm Poison Sect expert flying into some invisible barrier on his way down. He even sustained injuries because of it.”

Pei Qiqi was taken aback. “You’re kidding!”

“Trust me!”

Chapter 497: Accumulating Power

By the edge of the floating continent.

Covered in blood, Zhang Jiu dashed to Sun Xuan's side. Looking exhausted, he exclaimed, "Senior Martial Brother Sun!"

"Are you alright?" Sun Xuan hastily asked.

He was well-aware of Zhang Jiu's special status in the Poison Sect. Therefore, he was apparently concerned seeing Zhang Jiu in such sore straits.

"Sha Cheng got my life-spirit vermin killed," Zhang Jiu said with a cold face. Then, he glanced around and asked, "Where is he?"

"I sent him back to rescue you," Sun Xuan explained.

"Rescue me?" Zhang Jiu asked with a sarcastic smile. "I'll thank god if he doesn't get me in trouble."

As the two of them spoke, Sha Cheng dashed over from the distance. Seeing that Zhang Jiu was fine, he hastily explained, "Junior Martial Brother Zhang, I only cast a magic to detonate my own life-spirit vermin because there was something special about that guy. Not only were neither of our life-spirit vermin able to break away from him, but they were also rapidly losing their flesh power to him."

BAM!

Even though Sun Xuan was standing right beside them, Zhang Jiu slapped Sha Cheng across his face without any scruple.

"Even if you needed to detonate your life-spirit vermin, you should have told me beforehand!" Zhang Jiu shouted with a cold face. "You should have expected that the death of my life-spirit vermin would instantly take its toll on me! Just because you didn't tell me about it, that bitch got me when I was trying to escape, and cut off a chunk of my flesh!"

Pointing at the bloody mess on his left shoulder, he yelled, “You almost got me killed!!”

Sha Cheng touched his face and said in a low voice, “You were too far away from me. I couldn’t remind you even if I wanted to.”

Zhang Jiu grew furious. “Shut up! You didn’t remind me because you wanted to catch that guy off guard!”

SHEW! SHEW!

Two other Poison Sect disciples came from the distant void on floating rocks, and then arrived by their side.

“What happened?” One of them was surprised by Zhang Jiu’s condition.

Hoping to smooth things over, Sun Xuan said, “Alright, alright. Tell us what happened with your team.”

Zhang Jiu shot another nasty glance at Sha Cheng. Seeing that he had fallen silent, he finally decided to let it go. He turned to look at Sun Xuan and said, “Two strangers came to this continent, a young man and a young woman. The woman is skilled in spatial magics. The man is even weirder. When we unleashed our spirit vermin to gnaw on his flesh and inject venom into him, not only did he not die, but he even drained our spirit vermin of their flesh power.”

Sun Xuan spent a short while pondering in silence before saying, “That woman who’s skilled in using spatial power is probably Zhen Huilan’s disciple, Pei Qiqi. As for that weird young man, I can’t think of a name.”

Zhang Jiu gave a low chuckle. “Zhen Huilan’s disciple?” His face recovered its calm and peaceful state as he said, “The Tool Sect has lost its glory. It’ll only be a matter of time before Zhao Shanling takes it into his hands. As for Zhen Huilan, she’s nothing more than an exceptional equipment forger. Her battle prowess actually isn’t that formidable.”

Apparently, he didn’t put the deaths of He Xu, Wu Cui, and Luo

Ting on his mind.

“Now, they’re trapped on this floating continent. Senior Martial Brother Sun, if you guys go after them, they’ll die beyond the shadow of a doubt.” With a grin, Zhang Jiu added, “But I prefer you capture them and let me finish them off.”

Sun Xuan smiled bitterly and said, “I’m afraid that can’t happen.”

“Why?” Zhang Jiu was confused.

Sun Xuan pointed at the floating continent and said with a grim expression, “There’s something strange about this place. I tried to approach the land mass earlier, but I was stopped by an invisible barrier. I even sustained injuries from it.”

Upon hearing these words, the two Poison Sect disciples who had arrived just now were also taken aback.

Hence, the two of them, who were both at the early Worldly realm, also made an attempt to slowly approach the floating continent.

Just as they were about to reach the edge of the continent, they sensed the existence of a special ward. No matter what they tried, they couldn’t get through it.

Then, they rapidly shifted to other locations and tried to enter from there.

After a while, the two of them returned. Under Sun Xuan’s inquiring gaze, one of them shook his head in frustration and said, “You’re right. There is an invisible barrier around this floating continent. We tried everything from every direction, but whatever we did, we couldn’t go through the barrier.”

“You go and try again,” Sun Xuan said to Sha Cheng.

Sha Cheng didn’t dare to say no, and thus shot towards the floating continent under the others’ gazes. In the next moment, he

went through without encountering the slightest obstacle.

As Sha Cheng circled back, Sun Xuan realized what was happening. “The barrier is only effective on Qi warriors at the Worldly realm or higher. Those at the Greater Heaven stage and lower won’t be affected at all.”

“Are you sure, Senior Martial Brother Sun?” Zhang Jiu asked.

Sun Xuan nodded as he took out his Sound Stone and said, “Don’t worry, junior martial brother. I’ll summon our Greater Heaven stage disciples to this place right now.”

Also at that moment, Zhang Jiu and Sha Cheng realized why Pei Qiqi and Nie Tian’s seniors hadn’t showed up.

In Zhang Jiu’s eyes, Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi were already trapped on this floating continent. All he needed to do was wait for other Greater Heaven stage sectmates to come. Then, together, they would be able to take their time searching for and killing Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi, like catching a couple of turtles in a jar.

...

In the dense forest, Nie Tian stood beside Wu Cui and Luo Ting’s corpses, and observed Sun Xuan and the others via one of his Heaven Eyes. Increasingly certain of his speculation, he said to Pei Qiqi, “Listen to me. Worldly realm experts can’t set foot on this floating continent due to a special ward around it. Those from the Poison Sect are waiting for their Greater Heaven stage members to gather to this place and wipe us out together.”

Pei Qiqi settled down, and with a sharp and chilly look in her eyes, she said, “If Worldly realm experts can’t set foot on this continent, I suppose Profound realm experts can’t either. Let’s hope Profound realm experts from the Poison Sect won’t be able to penetrate that barrier after arriving here.”

After pausing for a few seconds, she added, intense killing intent filling her eyes, “If they can only send Greater Heaven stage Qi

warriors onto this continent, then this is where they will be buried!”

Nie Tian laughed wildly and said, “Alright then, let’s wait for the arrival of more Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciples!”

With these words, he assumed the lotus position and started preparing himself with his eyes narrowed.

One spirit stone after another flew out of his ring of holding and piled up before his crossed legs.

He placed his hand on the pile of spirit stones and started absorbing their spiritual power with the Qi Refining Incantation.

Pei Qiqi also stopped talking, sat down next to Nie Tian, and closed her eyes.

As he replenished his spiritual power with spirit stones, Nie Tian spared some of his attention to examine himself.

Earlier, he had drained the flesh power of the spirit vermin which had belonged to Zhang Jiu, Sha Cheng and the others.

Even the smallest bugs had turned out to contain copious amounts of flesh power. The flesh power Luo Ting’s and Wu Cui’s life-spirit vermin had carried wasn’t any less than two fourth grade spirit beasts, which had shocked Nie Tian.

Even though Zhang Jiu’s and Sha Cheng’s spirit vermin had self-detonated, Nie Tian had still absorbed a tremendous amount of flesh power from them before they had exploded.

At this moment, as he examined himself with a wisp of his psychic awareness, he could see fine wisps of flesh power flowing towards his heart like small streams, where they were savagely devoured by the green aura.

At the same time, the wood power he had absorbed earlier healed his wounds and injuries, which had been caused by the spirit vermin and their venom.

He had long since realized that, even though wood power had a limited effect on refining his body, its nourishing and healing ability went far beyond flesh power.

As wisps of rich wood power swam about inside of him, the flesh that had been rotted by toxins rapidly healed.

Even the fissures in several of his bones, which had been created by the toxins, flattened and healed under the nourishment of his wood power.

Then, he focused his attention on his vortex of wood power.

As he summoned liquidized wood power from the bottom of the vortex, he suddenly felt wisps of wood power starting to rise from the hundreds-of-meters-tall trees around him and converging on him.

Instead of flowing into his vortex of wood power, the wisps of wood power circulated within his meridians.

A warm and comfortable feeling made him feel as if he were bathing in a warm spring. All of his injuries caused by the spirit vermin healed at an alarming speed.

Only an hour later, he was fully healed.

Furthermore, the green aura in his heart had also devoured every last bit of the flesh power he had previously absorbed from the spirit vermin.

He felt very refreshed.

Meanwhile, his nine Heaven Eyes were still floating by the edge of the floating continent, keeping a close watch on the Poison Sect disciples.

He discovered that some Worldly realm disciples seemed to have received word and come over, though none of them had managed to penetrate the barrier.

Perhaps because Greater Heaven stage disciples were relatively

weak, or they were rushing over from farther locations, but they hadn't arrived yet.

Upon seeing this, Nie Tian continued to recover his strength with spirit stones. By the time his spiritual sea was replenished, he went on to refine it.

After some time, a Profound realm member of the Poison Sect arrived.

“A Profound realm expert!”

Chapter 498: Let Me Have a Try

Upon noticing the arrival of a Profound realm Poison Sect expert, Nie Tian ended his cultivation and observed closely via his Heaven Eyes.

The man was Lu Bai, a late Profound realm expert and the leader of the Poison Sect's team in this dimension.

Before arriving, he had learned about the anomaly the other Poison Sect disciples had encountered here.

Upon seeing him, Zhang Jiu and the others bowed respectfully towards him, and referred to him as their martial uncle.

Lu Bai nodded and quickly unleashed his soul awareness, hoping to conduct a thorough examination of every inch of this floating continent.

However, in the next moment, he said with furrowed eyebrows, "This is strange..."

Even his soul awareness couldn't pass the special barrier that surrounded the entire continent. As his soul awareness made contact with the barrier, he could sense a strong force of expulsion.

Even though he cast several exquisite spells in a row, he failed to get his soul awareness past the barrier.

"This continent is very special, martial uncle," Sun Xuan explained. "When we arrived, we tried to scan it with our soul awarenesses as well, but that barrier warded off all of our soul awarenesses."

Lu Bai's eyes slightly widened as he asked, "Have you tried using your spirit vermin?"

Every disciple of the Poison Sect raised their own spirit vermin and life-spirit vermin.

In Lu Bai's eyes, if they indeed couldn't pass the barrier

themselves, maybe they could try to send their spirit vermin past it.

With a bitter smile, Sun Xuan shook his head and said, “Perhaps because our spirit vermin carry our aura, they were also denied entry by that barrier.”

The tips of Lu Bai’s eyebrows rose, as if he found it more interesting than troubling. “All of the floating lands we saw on our way here were completely devoid of spiritual energy. This continent is the only exception. Not only do sky-reaching trees grow on it, but it’s also wreathed in rich wood power. This continent must be beyond ordinary. I bet there are secrets about this continent that we don’t know yet.”

With these words, he started trying more profound Poison Sect magics, hoping to make a difference.

Countless tiny spirit vermin shot out of his leveled cuff, which fell towards the floating continent like raindrops.

Upon seeing this, Nie Tian, who was in the central area of the floating continent, suddenly grew nervous.

It was beyond doubt that that spirit vermin raised by a Profound realm expert would be extremely powerful. Even if just Lu Bai’s spirit vermin managed to pass the barrier, they would cause Nie Tian and Pei Qiqi serious trouble.

Hence, he paid close attention to them and everything around him.

Immediately afterwards, he sensed that the ancient trees, which were deeply rooted in this continent, seemed to be activated.

Green, flickering spots started to rise from the huge trees and infuse into the invisible barrier around the floating continent, gradually making it visible.

Soon, a ellipsoidal, translucent, dark-green ward presented itself.

Innumerable complicated patterns could be vaguely seen on the translucent, dark-green ward, which looked very much like tree patterns. Instead of staying in one location, the patterns constantly shifted about on the ward.

As the spirit vermin unleashed by Lu Bai fell on the dark-green ward like countless leaves, the patterns on the ward instantly lit up.

As bright light spread out from the contact points like ripples, some mysterious power quietly counterattacked.

Each and every spirit vermin that fell on the dark-green ward let out ear-piercing shrieks and flew back to Lu Bai's side.

Lu Bai gasped slightly and looked even more intrigued as he said, "Impressive! This continent must be beyond ordinary!"

With these words, he took the initiative and pulled all of his spirit vermin back, and then said to Zhang Jiu with a grim expression, "Soon, all of our Greater Heaven stage disciples will rush over here. When they arrive, lead them into the forest and get rid of those two first, and then conduct a thorough scan of the continent."

"There must be something very special about this floating continent. Perhaps some fortune that's only meant for you is hiding somewhere."

"As you say, martial uncle." Zhang Jiu behaved politely and modestly before him.

Very happy about his attitude, Lu Bai nodded and said, "As for your life-spirit vermin, you can pick another one to tame after we return to our sect."

"Many thanks, martial uncle," Zhang Jiu said with a smile.

...

In the central area of the floating continent.

Having seen and heard everything with the help of his Heaven Eyes, Nie Tian let out a sigh of relief as he realized that the late Profound realm Lu Bai wasn't able to pass through the ward.

As for other Poison Sect Greater Heaven stage disciples, he wasn't worried at all.

Hence, he found his inner peace and started practicing cultivation wholeheartedly.

As Lu Bai withdrew his swarm of spirit vermin as well as his soul awareness, the dark-green ward gradually faded away.

Without Heaven Eyes to use, Pei Qiqi didn't know exactly what had happened.

However, seeing that Nie Tian had resumed his cultivation, she realized that they were temporarily safe.

She had great confidence in Nie Tian's mysteriously keen perception.

Sitting in silence, Nie Tian examined his spiritual sea in his dantian region, and discovered that earlier, as the dark-green ward had gradually presented itself, the reintegration of the broken will of the titan floating within his vortex of wood power seemed to have accelerated significantly.

"What's..." He was increasingly certain that this floating continent might have some sort of connection with the magical land where he had obtained Fruits of Life.

"Is this continent somehow related to titans?" With such thoughts on his mind, he paused his cultivation with spirit stones and suddenly stretched his hand up towards the heavens, as he summoned his spiritual power with the special technique he had picked up from that mysterious land.

As soon as he did, he instantly felt rich and pure wood power converge on his raised palm from all directions.

In a flash, that hand was wreathed in swirling wisps of freshly-green wood power. Gradually, an emerald-green energy ball came to form.

However, his accumulation of wood power and the refinement of his vortex of wood power had long since reached the point where they were ready for his next breakthrough.

Therefore, he wasn't able to channel more wood power into his brimming vortex of wood power.

He could only watch the emerald-green energy ball gradually expand in his palm.

After pondering for a while, he looked up at the energy ball and thought to himself, "Maybe I can use it as a means of attack." He was more and more expectant for more Poison Sect Greater Heaven stage disciples to come to this floating continent.

Just as he was about to test out the might of the ball full of wood power, Pei Qiqi's eyes snapped open. She looked over, her eyes filled with surprise.

Her eyes shone with sharp, intelligent light. "What's that you're forming in your hand, Nie Tian? I can sense very rich wood power from within that emerald-green ball of energy."

"It's one of my means of attack," Nie Tian answered.

"A means of attack?" Confusion appeared in Pei Qiqi's eyes. After a moment of hesitation, she asked, "Then why am I sensing nothing but vigorous wood power from it? I only heard wood power could be used to heal injuries. Well..."

With these words, she grew somewhat bashful. "I actually sustained some injuries before."

Nie Tian instantly understood what she wanted to say. With a hearty smile, he said, "I don't plan to absorb the wood power within this energy ball anyways. Do you want me to try to heal your injuries with it?"

Pei Qiqi's eyes lit up slightly as she said, "That'd be good."

Nie Tian rose to his feet and circled to her back, carefully carrying the energy ball in his palm.

He pressed his empty hand on Pei Qiqi's back and sent a wisp of soul power from his fragmentary stars into her to examine the injuries she had told him about.

However, as soon as his wisp of power entered Pei Qiqi, Nie Tian's expression flickered.

Thanks to the keen perception of that wisp of soul power, he instantly discovered that Pei Qiqi's meridians and veins were currently filled with glowing, tiny blades of spatial energy, which carried an aura that didn't belong to her.

Those tiny, sharp blades of spatial energy were roaming her system and damaging her from the inside.

As Nie Tian sensed the situation inside her with rapt attention, he soon realized that those blades of spatial energy were probably from the floating volcano with a penetrating hole in it.

"Do you see them?" Pei Qiqi asked with a soft voice.

Nie Tian nodded with a grim expression and said, "These are some serious injuries."

"The blades of spatial energy came from the profound energy the outsider had used to kill that Earth Flame Beast." Pei Qiqi looked down at the ground. "Due to my insufficient cultivation base, as I allowed it into myself to derive enlightenment from it, I began to suffer from it as well. It'll still take me a long time to solve all of the mysteries in it and refine it fully."

"If we weren't surrounded by enemies, that wouldn't be a problem. But now, Poison Sect disciples could rush in here at any moment."

With a deep breath, Nie Tian said with a solemn expression, "Let

me have a try.”

Chapter 499: Heavenly Wood

Pei Qiqi's injuries were much more serious than she had said they were.

As the wisp of Nie Tian's soul power roamed around inside of her, he grasped even the most subtle changes happening inside of her, with her spiritual sea being the only exception.

Numerous tiny, glowing blades of spatial energy were flowing around within her meridians and veins, inflicting damage on her fleshy body and life force.

Nie Tian saw with great clarity that several of her veins were almost severed, and obvious fissures had appeared in some of her bones.

She was trying to suppress the blades of spatial energy with her own strength and heal her injuries with her spiritual power.

However, she didn't possess a supernatural healing ability like Nie Tian.

It would probably take a very long time for her to heal herself without help from others.

Also, she couldn't fight during the healing process. Otherwise, her injuries would worsen.

After a brief scan, Nie Tian started trying to infuse the wood power within his energy ball into her body, and use it to heal her damaged veins, meridians, and bones.

However, for some reason, he seemed to be unable to channel the wood power from his energy ball into her body.

After a few failed attempts, he eventually had to give up.

He shook his head and said with an apologetic expression, "Sorry, it's not working. Perhaps it's because you don't cultivate and practice wood power that I can't seem to channel the wood

power into you. I tried many times, and it turns out I can't."

"It's alright. I just thought it was worth a shot. I didn't put much hope in it anyways." Looking a bit tired, Pei Qiqi walked away and put some distance between Nie Tian and herself. "You can go back to practice cultivation. Don't mind me."

"B-but your injuries are actually quite serious..." Nie Tian sounded concerned.

"It's alright. I still can suppress them for now," Pei Qiqi said with a seemingly unconcerned expression. "I'll have plenty of time to heal myself after we get rid of all of the Poison Sect disciples that dare to come here for us. Stop worrying."

Nie Tian wished to help her, but since he didn't know how, he could only nod back at her and resume his cultivation.

A quarter hour later...

Via his Heaven Eyes, Nie Tian noticed that a few Poison Sect Greater Heaven stage disciples had arrived one after another.

However, they didn't seem to be in a hurry to go into action, as they seemed to understand Pei Qiqi's and his outstanding battle prowess, and thus decided to wait for more of their sectmates to arrive.

Hence, he continued to practice cultivation.

A while later, while he was absorbing spiritual power from spirit stones, a shudder suddenly ran through him.

To his shock, after months of reintegration, the broken will of the titan floating within his vortex of wood power finally completely realigned.

The moment it did, a message rose from his spinning vortex of wood power.

"Heavenly Wood!" These words were reflected in his mind with great clarity, as if they were instantly branded into his memory

and became a profound incantation at his command.

As he decoded the secret incantation granted to him by the titan, he discovered that it could be cast in two ways, thus giving rise to two different magics. “Heavenly Wood consists of two magics: Heavenly Wood Heal and Heavenly Wood Thorns!”

One was Heavenly Wood Heal, which would allow him to heal injuries and trauma within a short time. If he possessed enough liquidized wood power, he would even be able to reattach meridians or regenerate limbs.

The other was Heavenly Wood Thorns, which would allow him to send wood power into his enemies’ bodies, and then turn that wood power into sharp thorns.

The fierce thorns could grow and spread inside of his enemies, and even burst out of them.

Nie Tian mulled over these two methods of casting Heavenly Wood wholeheartedly.

A while later, he moved behind Pei Qiqi without getting her consent and said in a low voice, “Let me have another try on you, Senior Martial Sister Pei.”

“What?!” Pei Qiqi was taken aback.

“Let me try to heal your injuries again.” Nie Tian seemed rather excited. “I believe I’ll succeed this time!”

“Are you serious?”

“Of course!”

With these words, he pressed one hand on Pei Qiqi’s back and quietly cast the Heavenly Wood Heal.

As soon as he did, he sensed that his vortex of wood power started to spin at a higher rate, and the glittering, liquidized wood power at the bottom of the vortex was rapidly vanishing.

In the meantime, the hand on Pei Qiqi’s back turned emerald-

green and somewhat transparent.

Within his transparent meridians, flickering, green spots could be seen flowing from his hand towards the center of Pei Qiqi's back.

Seeing that he was finally able to channel wood power into Pei Qiqi's back, Nie Tian's eyes lit up. "Oh, it requires extremely concentrated, liquidized wood power to activate the Heavenly Wood Heal!"

The reason why he had failed to make use of the wood power in the energy ball earlier was because he hadn't acquired the magic and he hadn't personally processed and refined the wood power within the energy ball.

His ability to cast the Heavenly Wood Heal was dependent on the liquidized wood power that he generated from round after round of refinement of wood power.

Wisps of pure and nourishing wood power that were also laced with his aura flowed into Pei Qiqi's back under his control.

Then, he realized that the tissue that had been damaged by the fierce blades of spatial energy was rapidly healing.

As the wisps of pure wood power spread inside Pei Qiqi, the few almost severed meridians were healed at an alarming rate.

Even the fissures on some of her bones were rapidly erased as the wood power reached them.

Spirit aroused, Nie Tian continued to channel more of his wood power to the cause. Meanwhile, he could sense the liquidized wood power rapidly vanishing from the bottom of his vortex of wood power.

Pei Qiqi's straightened back trembled slightly, her eyes shining with a glorious light of excitement.

The hand Nie Tian used to press on her back felt incomparably

warm. She could feel warm currents flowing into her back before splitting into countless fine wisps that were fixing her damaged meridians, veins, and bones.

If she had relied on just her own strength to heal those injuries, it might have taken her more than a month.

At this moment, she could physically feel all of her injuries being healed at an extremely fast rate.

With her back towards Nie Tian, her normally-cold but gorgeous face was now filled with joy. She had expected that Nie Tian was a man of many secrets, but she had never expected that he actually had the ability to heal her.

Within seconds, she already felt that her injuries, which had bothered her for quite some time, had mostly been healed.

She was aware that if Nie Tian wasn't able to heal her, she would definitely suffer serious injuries when fighting more disciples of the Poison Sect.

The large amount of small blades of spatial energy would have further ravaged her fleshy body and life force.

Just as she was carried away by these thoughts, Nie Tian's voice echoed out by her ear, "More Poison Sect disciples are coming at us!"

She snapped back to reality and took the initiative to end the ongoing healing process. She turned around to look Nie Tian in the eye. A rare, faint smile appeared on her face, making her look more beautiful than a hundred blossoming flowers as she said, "I'm fine now."

Sitting on the ground, Nie Tian looked up at her and the smile on her face, and he was temporarily bewildered.

She was always cold and expressionless. Even if it was just a faint smile, it multiplied her singular beauty and bedazzled Nie Tian.

“How are you doing?” Pei Qiqi asked with a concerned tone.

Nie Tian briefly examined himself, and discovered that he had already consumed more than half of his liquidized wood power reserve within such a short time.

He shook his head and said, “I’m fine.”

The energy ball that was still floating over his palm seemed to suddenly find out about his lack of wood power, and started pouring madly into his vortex of wood power.

Within seconds, the energy ball completely disappeared. Meanwhile, Nie Tian’s vortex of wood power rotated at full speed, and the consumed liquidized wood power was rapidly replenished.

“This place agrees with me,” he said with a bright smile. “The special environment here allows me to recover the wood power I spent on you at a shocking speed. I’ll continue to help you with your injuries after we get rid of those Poison Sect disciples. You can fight without any scruples. I’ll heal your injuries afterwards. Don’t worry.”

Pei Qiqi nodded gently. “Okay, I will.”

With a fierce smile, Nie Tian rose to his feet and summoned his Flame Star. “A total of nine people are coming at us this time. Aside from the two who escaped from us earlier, there’s only one late Greater Heaven stage disciple among the seven newcomers.”

“Good,” Pei Qiqi said in a composed manner. “Leave those two late Greater Heaven stage ones to me.”

“I’ve got a better plan,” Nie Tian said with a cunning and bloodthirsty grin. “Do you remember how we ambushed that Thunder Mountain Sect disciple to save Shi Qing? Since no Worldly realm or Profound realm experts can enter here, nor their soul awarenesses, there are many ways we can surprise them and take them out one by one.”

“You’ll lure them in while I surprise them from the dark. Let’s

work together and turn this floating continent into the grave of all Poison Sect Greater Heaven stage disciples!”

“Let’s do it,” Pei Qiqi sounded deeply intrigued.

Chapter 500: Thorns Protrude

Nine Poison Sect disciples marched by the foot of the trees that were hundreds of meters tall, with Zhang Jiu at their head.

Countless tiny bugs of various colors filled the area around them like floating raindrops.

They used them to detect signs of life, hoping to track down Pei Qiqi and Nie Tian with them.

They also unleashed their psychic awarenesses and used them to scan their surroundings.

It wasn't long before they discovered a dead body. It turned out to be He Xu, who had been pierced through by multiple blades of spatial energy and died.

"Just as I expected, He Xu was killed," Zhang Jiu said with furrowed eyebrows. Without paying much attention to the corpse, they kept marching forward.

After some time, the multicolored spirit vermin flying in the front suddenly let out ear-piercing shrieks.

The nine of them dashed forward at full speed.

Moments later, they came to discover that Pei Qiqi was cornered by their swarming spirit vermin.

Behind her lay Wu Cui and Luo Ting's corpses.

"Junior Martial Sister Wu! Junior Martial Sister Luo!" The seven newcomer Poison Sect disciples burst into fury after seeing Wu Cui and Luo Ting's corpses.

The late Greater Heaven stage Jin Lin seemed especially furious.

Jin Lin had had an eye for Luo Ting, and everyone knew about his years of affection for her. When he saw Luo Ting's cold body lying in a pool of blood, his eyes seemed to be instantly painted red with blood.

Eyes extremely wide, he thundered, “Bitch!”

Then, he immediately commanded his spirit vermin to swoop towards Pei Qiqi.

Standing in place, Pei Qiqi was still expressionless, her four Ethereal Swords hovering around her. The tips of the swords shone with dazzling light, which seemed to be inducing changes to the space around her.

Meanwhile, numerous blades of spatial energy loomed behind the hovering Ethereal Swords, as if they were traveling back and forth between different spaces.

As Jin Lin’s spirit vermin swarmed towards her with ear-piercing shrieks, a mysterious, glowing light started to interweave within her pupils.

BZZZ! BZZZ! BZZZ!

Electric arcs rapidly rose and connected the glowing blades of spatial energy, forming a tight, glowing net around her, which sealed her off from the outside world.

As soon as Jin Lin’s spirit vermin made contact with the tight, glowing net, they split into pieces and fell to the ground.

“Pei Qiqi, is it?” Zhang Jiu asked, wearing a warm smile. “Didn’t think we’d return so quickly, did you? Where’s the guy that was with you? Why don’t you tell him to show himself.”

Pei Qiqi stood unwavering, her expression not changing a bit. “I already told him to leave while I keep you occupied.”

“He left?!” Surprised, Zhang Jiu scanned the vicinity with his psychic awareness. As Pei Qiqi said, he indeed couldn’t find any other signs of life in the vicinity.

“No way!” Sha Cheng shouted.

Earlier, Nie Tian had chased him to the edge of the floating continent, but upon seeing Sun Xuan, he had immediately

retreated to the heart of the forest.

Later, more powerful experts from the Poison Sect had rushed over and surrounded this floating continent.

Not a single one of them had ever noticed anyone leaving.

That meant Nie Tian was still on this mysterious continent.

“Forget about that guy. Let’s kill this bitch first, and then we can take our time looking for him.” With a cold snort, Jin Lin unleashed his life-spirit vermin.

It was a large, cyan gecko that was about half a meter long.

Its skin gave off a misty, cyan aura as it shot directly towards Pei Qiqi, baring its teeth.

Upon seeing the cyan gecko, the other spirit vermin seemed to see their leader. They spread out and started squeezing their way into the spaces between the interwoven spatial blades.

At that moment, Pei Qiqi gestured with her index and middle fingers, forming a sword and making a slashing motion in the air.

As she did, the spatial blades hovering around her suddenly unwove and united into one sizable blade that exuded frosty spatial energy.

As it shot straight ahead with great force, ripples of spatial energy spread out from within it.

FIZZ! FIZZ!

It was as if the space before Pei Qiqi was even ripped open temporarily.

Seeing the large, glowing spatial blade shooting towards it, Jin Lin’s life-spirit vermin trembled slightly and moved about to dodge it, as if it felt the horrifying might of the blade.

BANG! BANG!

As the spatial blade traveled through the air ethereally, ripples of

spatial energy spread out. Wherever the rippled spread, countless flying spirit vermin dropped dead.

The spatial blade seemed to have locked in on the cyan gecko, following it closely wherever it went, as if it had intelligence.

Jin Lin's expression flickered as he exclaimed, "This woman has some weird means of attack!"

Zhang Jiu let out a cold snort and said, "Would I have ended up covered in wounds if she didn't?"

With these words, he pointed at Sha Cheng and the other Poison Sect disciples, and yelled angrily, "What the hell are you waiting for?!"

Zhang Jiu had barely escaped from Pei Qiqi and ended up in very sore straits. Therefore, he knew Pei Qiqi's terrifying battle prowess better than any of the others on his team.

However, since he had already sustained rather serious injuries, he didn't wish to personally get into combat against Pei Qiqi again, and so instead urged others to do it.

No one dared to disobey his order, including Sha Cheng.

Hence, upon hearing his words, everyone except him summoned their spirit vermin with their minds and commanded them to attack Pei Qiqi.

In the blink of an eye, sky-filling, multicolored spirit vermin swarmed towards Pei Qiqi like a storm of bugs.

Meanwhile, they each unleashed their life-spirit vermin, which were significantly larger than the regular spirit vermin. With mad, blood-curdling shrieks, they rapidly approached Pei Qiqi.

Facing the spirit vermin swarm that would engulf her in the next moment, Pei Qiqi frowned slightly as her jade-like hands wove in the air, forming exquisite hand seals.

Multiple visible ripples of spatial energy that resembled water

ripples spread out from within her.

Even though she stood in place, graceful and unwavering, through the spreading ripples, it looked as if she had suddenly split into dozens of clones.

In the eyes of the Poison Sect disciples, it seemed as if dozens of Pei Qiqi's were standing in separate spaces, and there was no way to identify which was real and which wasn't.

Confused and disoriented, the spirit vermin shrieked as they searched madly for her between the spaces.

After observing her with a frown for some time, Zhang Jiu's expression grew grim as he blurted, "She's nothing like her master! The spatial magics she practices aren't just limited to building teleportation portals and teleportation magics. She's actually more skilled in combat spatial magics, the most powerful kind!"

Those who practiced spatial magics usually had their own areas of focus. Some focused on building spell formations and teleportation portals, like Zhen Huilan. These people were usually skilled in building all sorts of teleportation portals, even inter-realm teleportation portals.

Meanwhile, there were others who focused on applying spatial magics to strengthen their battle prowess.

These people were usually less skilled in building spell formations or teleportation portals, but their battle prowess was usually shockingly high.

Zhao Shanling, who had run amuck in the Realm of Unbounded Desolation, belonged to the latter kind. That was why his battle prowess had been unmatched by others at the same cultivation realm as him.

Pei Qiqi's focus of cultivation was clearly different from that of her master's. Like Zhao Shanling, Pei Qiqi also focused on

enhancing her battle prowess with all sorts of spatial magics.

PHOOH!

As soon as Zhang Jiu uttered those words, a dark-green toad was cut in half from head to tail by the long, glowing spatial blade.

The toad was the life-spirit vermin of a middle Greater Heaven stage Poison Sect disciple. The moment it was killed, the man let out a muffled groan, blood spilling from his mouth.

The strong backlash caused him to stagger back a few steps before resuming a firm foothold.

As he staggered back to the foot of a sky-reaching tree, a streak of green aura suddenly shot into his back. Startled, the man exclaimed and turned around, but failed to see any anomalies.

However, as soon as the streak of wood power entered his body, it started to take root and grow inside of him like a germinating seed.

Meanwhile, the streak of wood power also started to absorb his flesh power. Within a very short time, the streak of wood power grew into a small, emerald-green tree in the man's chest.

As it continued to absorb the man's flesh power, its sharp branches pierced through his heart and stuck out of his chest.

It glowed with sparkling, green light as it did.

Only when the branches punctured the man's heart did he come to his senses. With his last breath, he let out a miserable scream. "Someone attacked me from the dark!"

Zhang Jiu jerked his head back and saw emerald-green lights sticking out of the man's chest.

The lights were in the shape of tree branches, and as sharp as blades.

BOOM!

With a loud crash, the man collapsed to the ground, and his heart stopped forever.

Zhang Jiu went blank for a few seconds before snapping back to reality and yelling, “Watch out, everyone! That guy is hiding in the dark and looking for opportunities to attack us!”

All of the Poison Sect disciples that were converging on Pei Qiqi looked deeply shocked. They no longer dared to go all-out to attack Pei Qiqi, and instantly grew vigilant.

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